Tell stories
through painting
Caroline Gariba shows
how to paint an illustrative
fantasy scene

plus

Detailed editorial illustrations
Drawing dark fairytales
Abstract animal sketches
Create sci-fi VFX
Create a sci-fi cloud-scooper
and much more!

Editor's Letter

ANNIE MOSS
Junior Editor

2dartist is now on Facebook!

Welcome to *2dartist* issue 124!

This month in *2dartist* we have loads of detailed tutorials, including Caroline Gariba's guide to creating narrative fantasy art. Stephanie Cost shows us how to speed paint the aurora borealis, Col Price demonstrates how to develop a futuristic flying vehicle from an elevated viewpoint and Juan Novelletto continues his series on sci-fi fundamentals by exploring VFX.

You can also explore the work of editorial illustrator Dennis Wunsch and Splash Damage's game developer Andy Porter. Freelance illustrator Jade Mere lets us look inside her sketchbook and traditional artist Alex Kuno shows us his dark fairytale inspired drawings. Luigi Memola also demonstrates how he renders 3D models in Photoshop to complete an image and we take a look at ten of the best recent images!
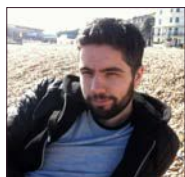
Contributors

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JADE MERE
Jade Mere, based in the US, is an illustrator and writer. She currently works as a freelance illustrator while continuing to expand her portfolio and explore new painting techniques.

STEPHANIE COST
Stephanie is a New York transplant living in Seattle, USA. She loves to explore the city and surrounding forests and incorporates both into her artwork. Stephanie currently freelances as an illustrator.

CAROLINE GARIBA
Caroline Gariba is a freelance illustrator from São Paulo, Brazil. She studied advertising before discovering digital painting and has since worked for clients including Fantasy Flight Games, and Passion Pictures.
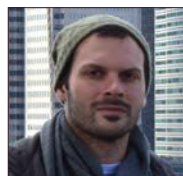
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Juan Novelletto is a senior concept artist at NGD Studios, developing the *Master of Orion* reboot, and art director at the indie games studio Nastycloud. He is based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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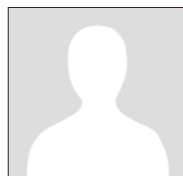
COL PRICE
Col Price is a freelance concept artist and art director based in Liverpool, UK. He has twenty years experience in the gaming industry and has worked for some of the biggest studios.

ALEX KUNO
Alex Kuno is a full-time traditional artist based in Minnesota, USA. He uses a wide variety of media to create his captivating, and unsettling illustrations, showcasing them in exhibitions and projects.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUBMIT TO 2DARTIST?
We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: **annie@3dtotal.com**.
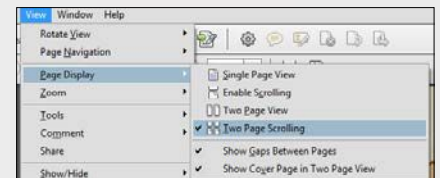
Your Magazine.

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If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

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For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: **DOWNLOAD**

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Jump to articles

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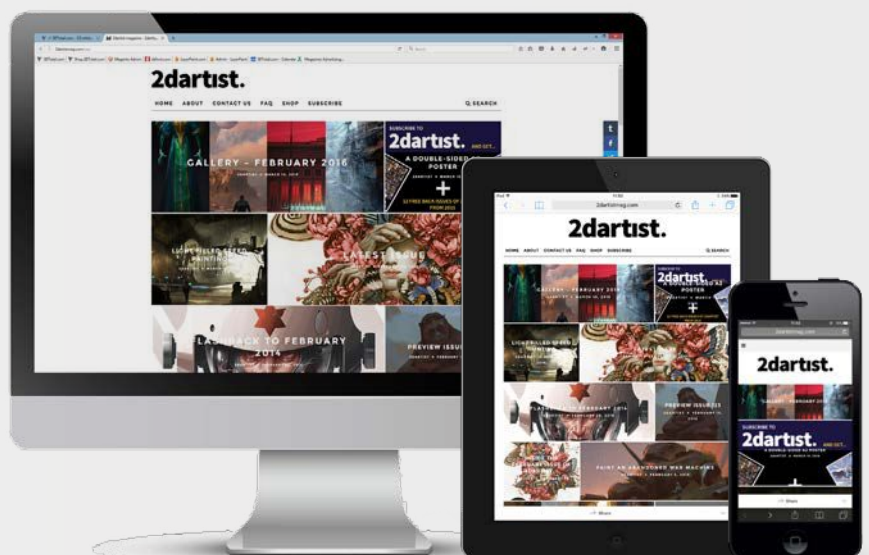
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The Artist

Dennis Wunsch
denniswunsch.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Dennis Wunsch, based in Seattle, is Creative Director at Scotsman Guide Media. He also contributes editorial illustrations for the company's twice monthly business to business publications.
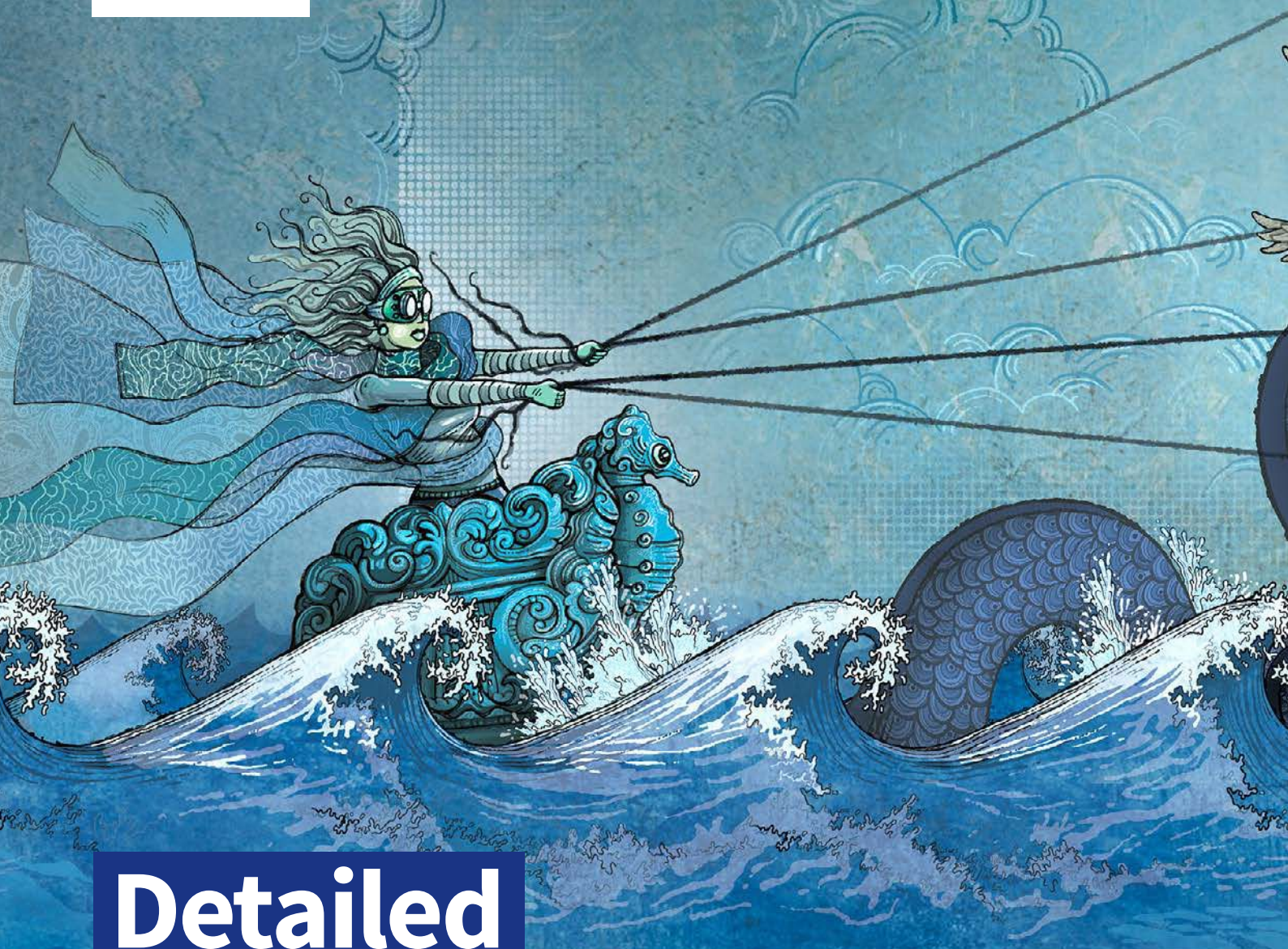
Detailed editorial illustrations

Creative Director and illustrator Dennis Wunsch discusses his intricate illustrations and diverse career... ▶

For the past thirty five years Dennis Wunsch has created intricately detailed illustrations for the entertainment industry and advertising agencies, and now directs his skills to producing editorial illustrations for Scotsman Guide Media.

Having started his illustrative career drawing *Scooby-Doo* and *Super Friends* cartoons for Hanna-Barbera, and since switching creative fields, he has gone on to win numerous awards for his work, including multiple Azbee awards (from the American Society of business Publication Editors) and also MAGGIE awards (from the Western Publishing Association).

Now Dennis is the Creative Director of a busy media company and provides monthly illustrations to two of the company's magazines. Taking time out from his busy schedule, Dennis spoke to 2dartist about his passion for creating multi-layered illustrations, crafting his artwork around an article, and gives his advice for anyone just starting out in their digital art career…

2dartist: Hi Dennis, thank you for talking to 2dartist! Can you kick things off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your work?

Dennis Wunsch: Yes, and thank you very much for inviting me to participate in the interview. I have always loved drawing as far back as I can remember. I had some amazing people to learn from going back as far as grade school, where one teacher taught me perspective and architectural drawing. During high school, I also took traditional painting classes at a local community college for fun.

After receiving a Fine Art degree, one of my first illustration jobs was drawing key frames for *Scooby-Doo* and *Super Friends*, for Hanna-Barbera cartoons. Then, I switched gears and spent over twenty years as an art director and creative director at several advertising and marketing firms in Southern California. I developed my design skills and learned how things work on "the other side of the desk" while working with many well-known illustrators.

I created illustration projects myself during this time too, but not as a central focus. Currently, at Scotsman Guide Media, I'm the primary illustrator for two monthly business publications. I average about nine or ten illustrations each month as well as managing the production/art department. I feel absolutely blessed to be doing what I love to do and to be able to make a living with my artwork.

2da: Your works have a really distinctive style, often with bright colors and multiple layers of detail, do you have any tips for readers who want to recreate this in their own work?

● "Don't Need No Education? Think Again"

"When I first started out, everything was done using traditional media. Now, I absolutely prefer working with digital"

DW: Sure! I do try to add a great deal of detail to my illustrations, in order to try and set my work apart from others, and also because many of the editorial features created are for tabloid sized publications, which allows for more detail and scope than a standard size magazine.

When working digitally I try to archive as many of the textures and backgrounds I create as I can for re-use later on. This comes in handy if you're on tight deadlines – and who isn't? Ideally I like to adjust and re-purpose these as much as possible, or combine them in different ways so that each artwork is unique, but similar.

My art often has hundreds of layers so organization (and patience) helps too. Lately I like to create illustrations where there's not a real perspective or view point, and that might subconsciously make the reader take a second look at things, maybe without knowing exactly why.

2da: What was it about digital illustration that made you want to switch from traditional?

DW: When I first started out, everything was done using traditional media. Now, I absolutely prefer working with digital. It allows me to make changes, compare options and go back to the original if I don't like an "experiment." ▶
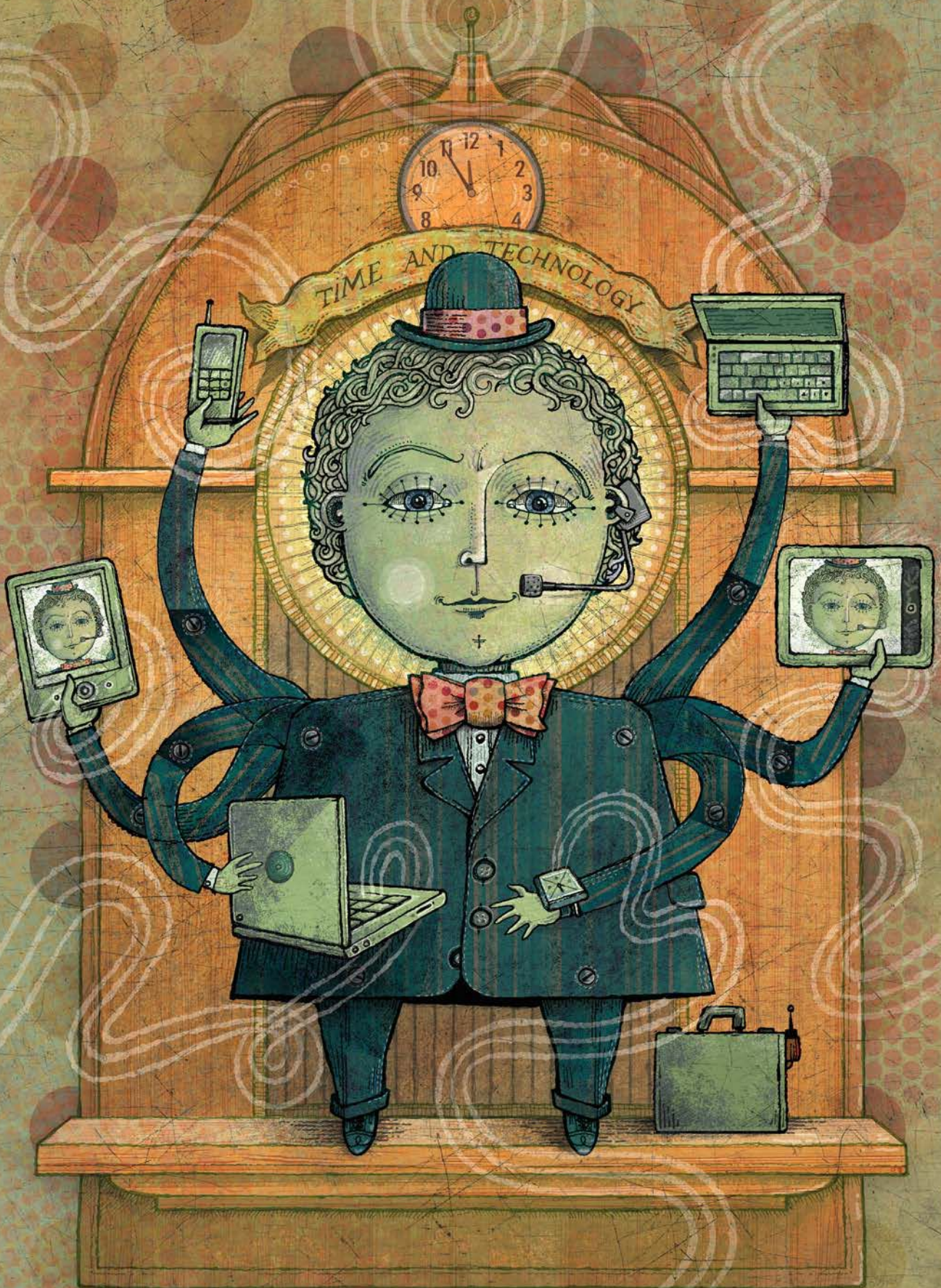
With traditional art, it is not so flexible. I like to try different color palettes, textural options and other details only possible via digital media. But, even though most of my work is now digital art, at times, I still incorporate scanned sketches and lines that are added to give it a hint of uniqueness. And my desktop today is a lot neater than it used to be when working with pencils, brushes, paints, and so on.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with? Are there any brushes that you find yourself using again and again?

If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out, what advice would you give?

I'd remind my younger self of two important things:

1. Network. Keep in touch with everyone. My younger self won't know who might be an important contact in the future. It's a small world.

2. Start every project like it's the most important one that you've ever worked on. See what you can do to make each project turn out to be something that you'd be proud of. Unfortunately they all don't turn out that way but without giving it that extra push, it's less likely to become something you'll be happy with in the end.

"Testing the Waters, Again"

● "Slay the Time Monster"
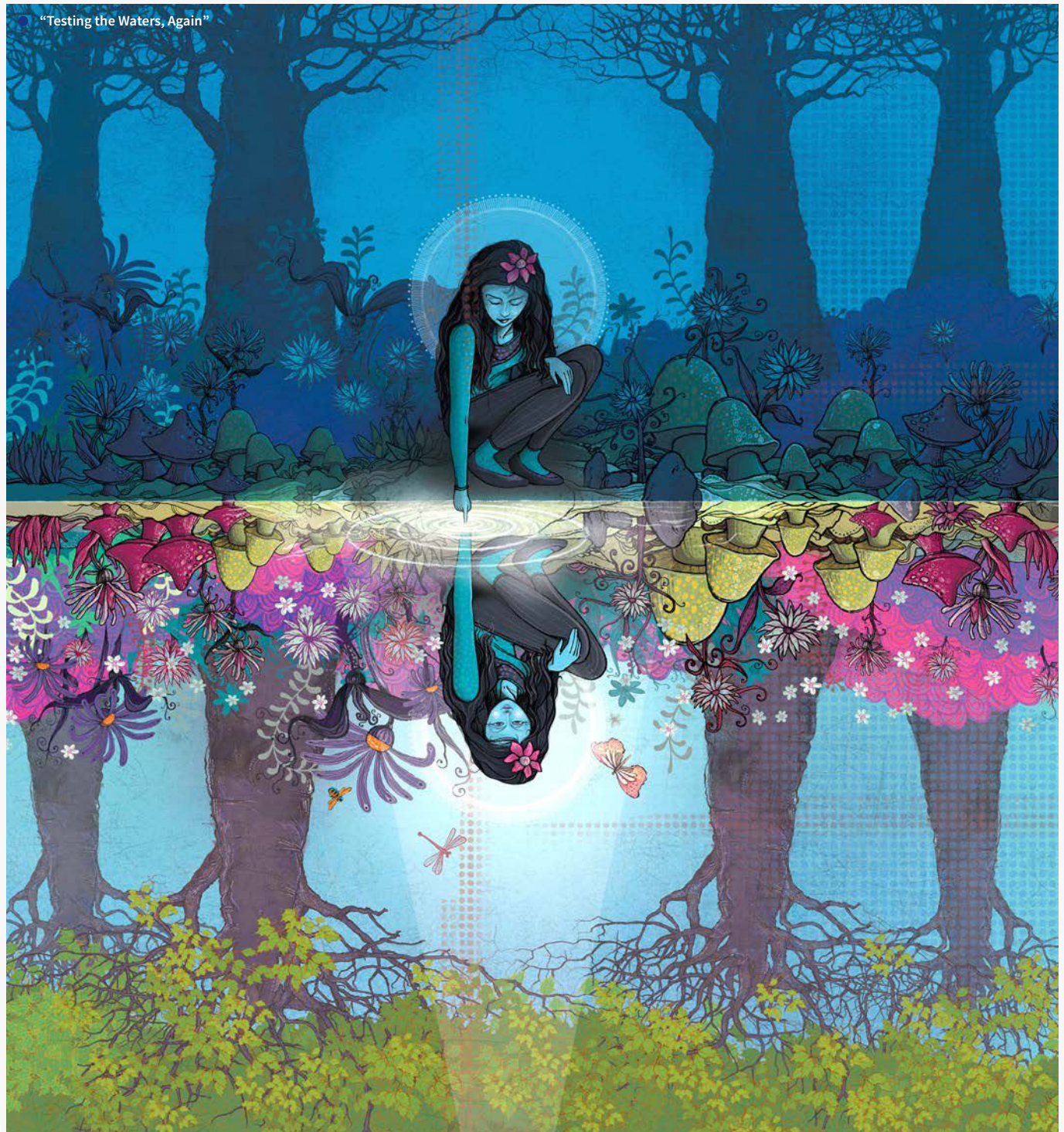
DW: My tools are actually pretty simple. I use Adobe Photoshop, a Wacom Cintiq and a basic stylus. I don't use fancy brushes, or many of the bells and whistles available – although I've tried some and created a few.

I try to make my work stand out by what I draw or paint, and not so much by the technology alone. Not that there's anything wrong with utilizing technology, it's just not the direction I choose to go in. That might be obvious when looking closely at the details in my illustrations. I also use a number of back-up drives and archival drives for keeping files handy.

2da: Are there any tools, techniques or software you would like to explore in the future, and why?

DW: Many! Even though I don't consider myself cutting-edge-technical with the computer, I do like to try different ways to produce work. There are always new things being added to the software and hardware. I'm constantly trying different things, different ways to improve my technical abilities, and I try to find better, more efficient ways to work without sacrificing quality. Learning new things never goes out of style no matter how long one does this. Especially when working digitally!

2da: Is there a particular artist or group of artists whose work you find particularly inspires your work?

DW: There are so many talented artists and illustrators out there and I enjoy researching and seeing what others are doing, whether or not it's similar to my styles. Many have been an influence, but not one single artist.

I do have some favorites though. For one of my styles, I am inspired by, and do my best to channel a blend of Jack Unruh, Alan E. Cober and Ralph Steadman. If only I could! ▶

● "Due Diligence Deposits: More Friend Than Foe"

"Ethics in the New Era"

● **"Climbing Out of Distress"**

It's very hard to pick a couple of others but some that stand out for me are: Anita Kunz, Bob Peak, Jody Hewgill, Constantinos "Ted" Coconis, Bart Forbes, Wilson Mclean, (one or two of these might need to be looked up by the younger crowd, as they are old-school favorites). Okay, I could take up the rest of the interview with more names here but I will stop for now.

2da: Where (and when) do you feel you are at your most creative?

DW: I've always been a night person so I tend to work late as there are not so many interruptions. My preferred studio space is my small home office, where I always have plenty of canine and feline supervisors that keep me company while I'm working. That being said, I often don't have the luxury of choosing when to work, especially if there's a particular deadline.

2da: What makes a project fun for you?

DW: I think the most fun – and also the most challenging part of a project – is trying to come up with a great idea. It's often more difficult to have a visual solution that works and that is unique,

What do you think has been most influential to your career success?

As mentioned earlier, I've had the pleasure of working with a lot of talented folks that I've been able to learn things from. There are many people who have taken time to mentor me and whether it's regarding illustration, design, typography, concepts or general business related, it all adds up to make me who I am today. So in general I'd say it is a group of important people along the way.

I do my best to pass information along to others too, as much as I can to keep paying it forward. I have found the illustration community in general is very giving when it comes to helping others succeed.

than creating the artwork itself. And no matter how well the artwork goes technically, if the idea isn't a good one it will probably not turn out as well as I'd like. After that, deciding what the best style for a particular illustration is fun as well.

2da: What has been the project you have most enjoyed working on?

DW: I honestly cannot call one project out. I enjoy working on many different projects, and even many types of projects. I've worked on advertising, editorial and institutional projects, I've painted murals, and drawn cartoons. I think that being able to work on different types of illustration projects, with a couple

of different styles keeps things very enjoyable for me. Recently I'm starting to work on children's picture book art too.

2da: What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project?

DW: The majority of my work is editorial lately. I really enjoy being given an article to read and see how creative I can get with it. This is within limitations since most of my current work is for a fairly conservative business to business audience.

The first step is reading articles and doing a lot of thinking. I scribble down as many ideas and notes so

● "Overseas Investors Join the Crowd"

"Being a consultant or freelancer, you've always got to balance creating the artwork, with marketing and business responsibilities"

I can remember them later. Often a lot of ideas seem good at first, but then I'll go back and edit out the ones that don't work as well. I like to work through a lot of ideas to be sure I have the best solution possible. Then I go to more detailed sketches to be sure the composition will work okay.

Compared to advertising work, there is usually more flexibility with editorial projects. So I tend to improve, add and fine-tune things as I go along, rather than have the entire thing perfectly pre-planned. If things change much during the process, I'll regroup with the Editor and be sure it's on track so there are no surprises. Sometimes I'll even have an A and a B variation to pick from at the end.

2da: What have you found most challenging about working freelance?

DW: Although currently most of my work isn't freelance, there was a time it was and then the biggest challenge for me was keeping up with the business portion of the work. Doing the artwork or illustration is the part I like best, so it's also the easy part to work hard on. Being a consultant or freelancer, you've always got to balance between creating the artwork, and your marketing and business responsibilities.

2da: How do you keep yourself motivated when working on a difficult project?

DW: That's one thing I never really had many issues with. Maybe because this is something I really like to do, I'm usually very self-motivated. Since I was a kid I was often up until 2, 3 or 4 am drawing for fun – and now it's for business. Sometimes a combination of strong coffee and music do help keep things moving along when there's a looming deadline, and still a lot of work yet to be done.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

DW: My first passion is creating art and illustrations, so I do work a lot of hours. My second passion is helping homeless dogs and cats.

Volunteering at several local no-kill animal shelters over the years has been something that I've really enjoyed, both fostering animals and designing fundraising and marketing materials. Because of this my wife and I have a not-so-small, well cared for herd of dogs and cats that keep us busy.

2da: Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

DW: Each month I've got new work appearing in the print and digital editions of Scotsman Guide Residential and Commercial Editions. Although most folks aren't able to subscribe to the print edition, you can look up the digital version online. Other projects show up on my website that I think might be of interest too. ●

Thank you Dennis for chatting to 2dartist!

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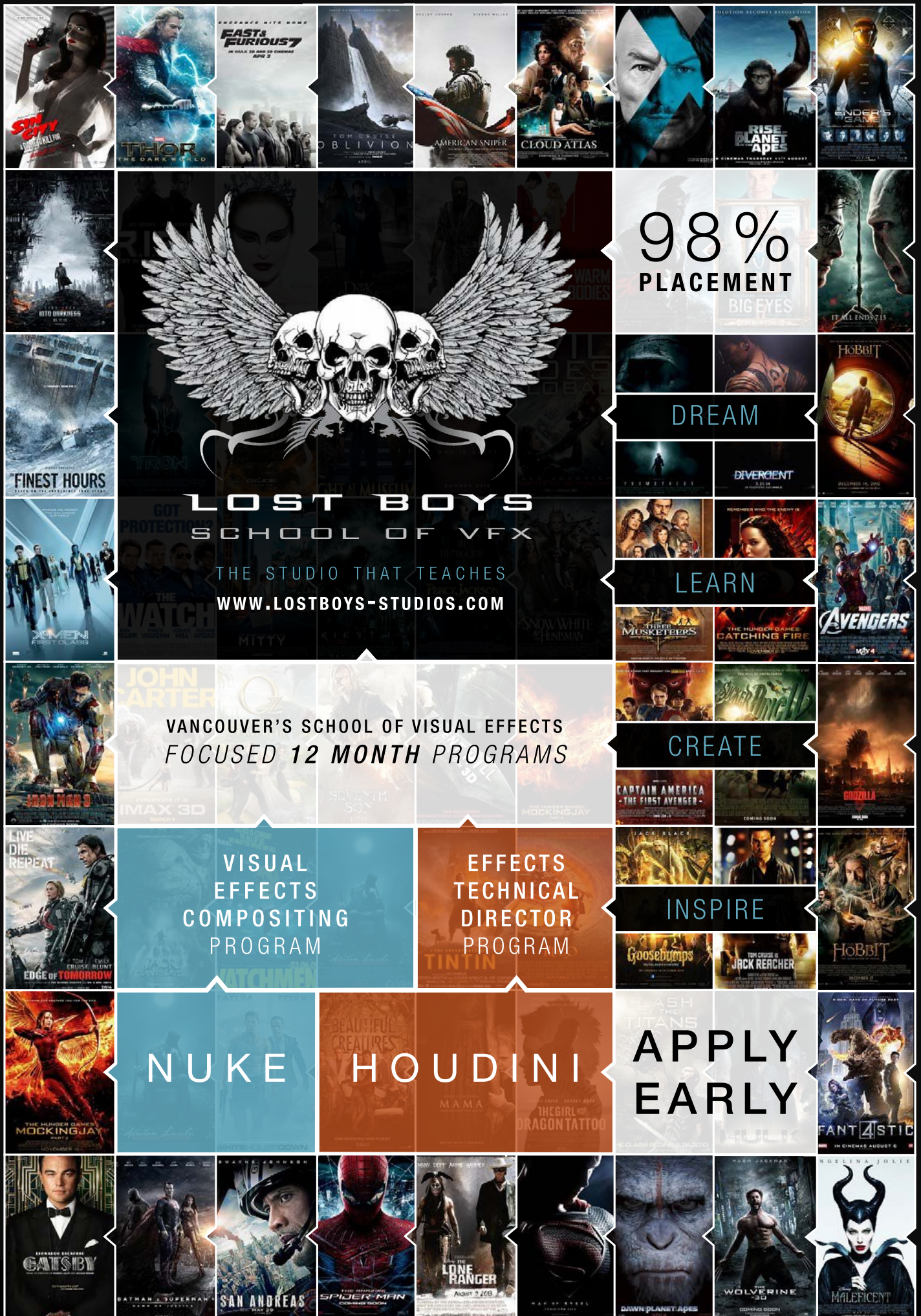
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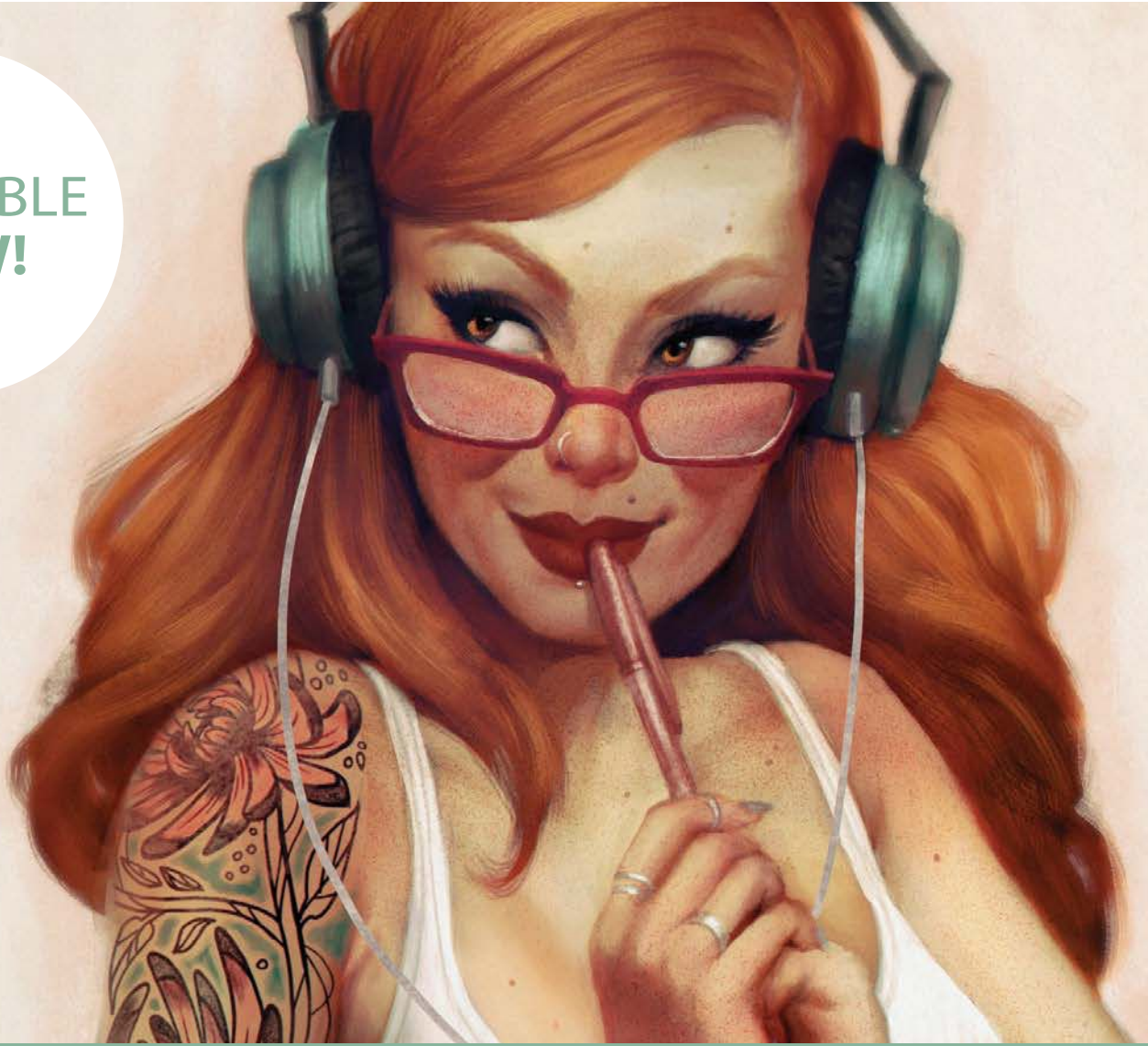
VOLUME 7

The popular *Digital Painting Techniques* series returns in its seventh spectacular installment to once again showcase the latest digital painting trends and techniques from talented experts, including Reneé Chio and Cris Delara.

In *Digital Painting Techniques: Volume 7* you will discover a variety of artists' methods for creating perfect pin-ups, impressive vehicles, breathtaking environments, magnificent mythological creatures, and much more! Plus you will learn how to craft matte paintings using Cinema 4D and brush up on your speed painting techniques. Browse for inspiration and to pick up top tips or follow project workflows in more detail with the step-by-step tutorials – either way, you'll open up the book and find something valuable to take away. Useful for intermediate digital artists and professionals, this title is another must-have for any digital artist's bookshelf!

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Inventing new worlds

Explore Splash Damage Andy Porter's videogame designs and concept art inspired by ancient cultures ▶

The Artist

Andrew Porter
phandy.co.uk

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Andrew Porter is a concept artist and designer in the videogame industry, living and working in London, UK. He currently works for the videogame developer Splash Damage.

Growing up, Andy Porter had no other ambition than to try to become a concept artist. Having been fascinated with videogames and art his whole life, Andy has developed his passion into an exciting career path. So far he has contributed to a number of well-known projects, including the *Batman Arkham Origins* and *Gears of War* videogames. Andy also spends much of his free time working on personal artwork and his world-building project *The Reach*.

A love of ancient cultures and fantasy settings has crept into Andy's work, helping him to rapidly invent stories and ideas for original concepts. Further to this, he mixes game design, narrative ideas, and 2D and 3D work together to construct inspiring and involved concepts. Andy speaks to 2dartist about why it's important to feel you are affecting the project in a positive way, how his success has come from passion and dedication, and shares his top tips for working as a professional concept artist…

2dartist: Hi Andy, thanks for talking to 2dartist today! Could you please begin by introducing yourself a bit to the readers?

Andy Porter: Hello 2dartist, it's my pleasure, and thank you for the interview and featuring me in the magazine. I am UK born and raised, have played videogames and loved art all my life. I grew up with no other idea than trying to become a concept artist.

I also love and enjoy a bunch of other stuff: sport, fitness, books, films, nature, science, traveling and many others (probably too many!) Since I started working as a concept artist, I have contributed to

The Gilded Claw Set

PHANDY 2015

sunRIDER

Discovery: sunRIDER

● The Reach: Stone Bell

several popular triple-A projects, including *Batman Arkham Origins* and *Gears of War*, as well as spending much of my free time working on some of my own personal artwork.

2da: Wide landscapes are quite a common feature in your 2D work – how do you create this powerful sense of space?

AP: For me, creating a great sense of space relies heavily on having an accurate sense of scale. If the viewer can easily identify how they would fit into the space then they can easily be drawn into it and become immersed. They will often identify how they fit into the space by recognizing details and objects

they know the size of. The most common is a human character, but details like doors and windows work. Smaller objects work too; anything that requires interaction with the human hand.

For creating the larger "epic" sense of space it's about repeating these reference objects and really exaggerating the difference in size between them. A human in the foreground, paired with a human that's just a dot in the background, will really let people know how huge the space is! Choose giant objects to space apart and the scale can become massive!

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any other artists you particularly admire?

AP: I have never really sat down and said "I need to look for inspiration," I just spend time doing the things I love and looking at things I like, then what I do is the culmination of that. When it comes to professional work, I will focus my search for ideas around the given subject matter and research deeply into it, seeing what inspiration arises as I explore.

As for artists, I recently experimented with writing down a clear list for me to focus on taking influence from, and I divided them into three areas of inspiration. For "design" I've always been hugely influenced by the work of my ex-colleague and friend Georgi Simeonov, as well as M C Barrett and Masamune Shirow. For "style" I look to legends ▶

Sense Collective: Snakeheads

● The Reach: The Consumed

> ## "It goes without saying that when the chance arises I love to get my pencils out and sketch in my sketchbook"

of comics like Mike Mignola, Hayao Miyazaki, and Moebius. For "technique" I learn a lot from digital painters like Jaime Jones, John Liberto, and Dorje Bellbrook. There are many more beyond this though and I am always looking out for what exciting things people are doing.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with? Are there any brushes that you find yourself using again and again?

AP: When it comes to working in Photoshop, I don't do anything too crazy, I use most of the tools in a logical way and use the right tool for the job. For professional and technical work I will use whatever I need, but sometimes for personal work I love nothing more than to stick with the paintbrush and as few layers as possible, just to keep things simple and paint! Right now I am having a lot of fun with the Mixer brush though, experimenting with it and finding new ways to use it.

As for my brushes, I have slowly refined my collection over time and have good brushes for most of the things I need without having a huge collection. But I always like to keep experimenting, I adjust and delete some of mine, find new ones online and try them out. I find that using new brushes is good practice to help you learn more and keep pushing your work in a new direction.

What do you think has been most influential to your career success?

It has to be the people who were and are around me. Growing up my family always encouraged me and once I proved I was dedicated to a craft they believed in me and did anything they could to help me.

I also used the Internet to be in contact with people who were traveling a similar path and learn from and with them. By the time I got to university it was the passion that I shared with my close friends about games, comics and art that allowed us to constantly motivate and push each other. The same happened when I started working in a studio, but now my friends around me also had a wealth of experience and knowledge I could learn from. The fastest I have ever improved was my first year in a studio. I feel the impact of the people around me cannot be understated.

2da: Which tools and software do you use? Are there any you would like to learn in the future?

AP: As is the standard for the industry, the majority of my work is done in Photoshop. For certain kinds of work I will have to use 3D and I use Maya and/or Unreal Engine for those. And of course it goes without saying that when the chance arises I love to get my pencils out and sketch in my sketchbook. As for new software I love to improve my work flow and experiment, so if I had time I'd love to try out all kinds of professional 3D software like MODO, 3D-Coat, KeyShot and OctaneRender.

2da: How does the diversity of implementing 3D into your workflow help your creative process?

AP: The great thing about 3D is you can really flesh out a design in depth. You can solve a visual design from many viewing angles, which can be very important for games where the players will be able to

see it from all around. It also helps for a design which requires animation, because you can test out those movements in 3D, and it can really speed up the final stages of a design painting when you can render out a scene with complete lighting and some materials to work on top of.

There is a hidden danger within 3D though where if you can only use the software at a novice level, your design can be hindered by your modeling skills and not reach its full potential. This is why for me it's important to solve as many problems, and visually satisfy the design, in 2D, where my skills are strongest, before moving to 3D.

2da: You have a world-building project, *The Reach*, can you tell us about your ideas behind the project?

AP: I always loved the idea of world building but never really found anything to sink my teeth into until about three years ago. I was on holiday on an

Andy's significant artwork

This is "The Reach: Village of Faces". It's not the first piece of work I did for *The Reach*, nor the best, but it might be the most important. It's significant because it's where I solidified a lot of my ideas, and stumbled upon many more. It brought together some of the designs I already had for the world, but then I combined them with the high key palette, a new style of painting, the pink-ish red that would become a hallmark for the project, and created something that I found interesting.

The public reception to it was great and that is what it took for me to stand back and realize I had created something that was genuinely unique, and something personal to me. It felt like the first time I was truly creating something that was mine and something I could be proud of. It's a relatively new feeling for me to have!

island in the Mediterranean and had only an empty sketchbook with me to work in. I decided I would fill it with nothing but world building ideas and started using what was around me and what I saw for inspiration; the arid landscape, the ancient ruins and the culture. I think my first drawing was a just a simple water jug!

I have always loved ancient culture and fantasy settings, so stories and ideas started forming rapidly. I mixed it with some game design and narrative ideas I have had for a while, and when I got home I started fleshing things out, collecting reference and writing out my ideas in full. I even started creating a prototype of a game idea with an artist-programmer friend of mine, so game design started having an impact on how I designed things too.

Unfortunately alongside full time jobs we were unable to find enough time to satisfy our visions for a game. The project is now just something I enjoy diving into for personal pleasure. I think my aim is to just produce some kind of small book of all my sketches and designs, nothing too elaborate, so that the world can speak for itself to the viewers.

⚡ PRO TIP

Don't be afraid to fail

It's so simple but it can be so hard to adhere to this rule. We love succeeding and we love doing the easiest option, but the times you learn the most are when you fail the hardest. So never be afraid to push yourself out of your comfort zone and try something new or take on a hard task. Try and do something different every time you draw or paint, even something small, and you can't lose.

2da: What makes a project fun for you?

AP: For me it requires one of two things (or both if I'm lucky!). The first is the ability to be creative, I want to be able to use my work to solve problems in interesting ways and feel like I am creating something unique in the painting or in the design. The other is to feel like I am having an impact, especially in professional work. It's great to feel like your work is important to the project and you are affecting the project in a positive way.

2da: Are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into and why?

AP: I would love to spend some time doing animation. I've always been hugely influenced by animated films and I would love to experiment with introducing movement into my work to bring it to life. And although it's not quite art and design, I did spend some time learning some basic scripting to try and create my own small games. But as fun as it was, it's a field of work that felt like it needed my complete dedication. I would love to have a whole other lifetime to learn programming so I could put all my art and game design ideas into practice.

2da: What do you find most challenging about working as a concept artist? ▶

Black Seas

PHANDY 2015

"When I'm feeling de-motivated because a project is hard or a little boring, I always try to use that time to focus in on something and make it a learning process"

AP: Being in a creative profession is amazing when you are in the zone, but sometimes your creative juices just aren't flowing and you can't afford to let this slow you down in a work environment. At these times it can be very hard to stay motivated. I find that you have to get back to basics and approach your work in a logical way. You know the work isn't going to just flow out of you, so you have to find a structured process that's going to bring the solution out of hiding.

Also as concept artists we tend to be dreamers and want our work to be exciting and unique, but sometimes the work doesn't require that and rightfully so. The work is often part of a bigger picture which you have to respect without letting it de-motivate you. By understanding you are helping many people in ways you might not think.

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

AP: When I'm feeling de-motivated because a project is hard or a little boring, I always try to use that time to focus in on something and make it a learning process. For example, if you are working on a boring subject matter, use that time to really focus on your material rendering or lighting, something technical. Choose a part of your work, channel your energy and make it the best you can.

If you really can't find motivation with your work then you need to satisfy yourself outside of that in your personal time, otherwise it can really build up and become a huge frustration. Find an outlet for your creativity. The times my personal work has been the most creative was when my professional work wasn't that exciting, so don't waste that chance to get excited about something personal.

2da: Can you tell us anything about the projects you are working on at the moment?

AP: Personally, I enjoy having my work collected into these little projects. So I have *The Reach* that I still work on occasionally and more recently a science fiction project called *Discovery*. It's about a small recon team who are the first to land on recently discovered planets.

As for professional work, I am actually contributing to several projects, but only two of them are currently announced. *Dirty Bomb* is Splash Damage's

PHANDY 2015

near-future PC First Person Shooter, with a great mix of realism and science fiction, where I work on everything from maps to weapons.

We also announced recently that we are helping out Microsoft with the production of *Gears of War 4*, where I am producing some concepts for the multiplayer maps.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

AP: I am always watching films, TV and always have a comic or book I am reading. I am keen on my fitness and regularly work out at the gym, I also play football weekly. My health, diet and fitness have become important to me over the years and contribute massively to my overall happiness, relaxation and motivation. Spending time with my girlfriend is important for that too!

⚡ PRO TIP

80/20
This is quite an abstract idea, but it's one that has come back around again and again for me, and I keep finding ways that it's useful. The simple idea behind it is using the ratio of 80/20 (some people use 70/30 or other "off balance" ratios) as way of balancing things within your work in an interesting asymmetrical way. It can be used to balance many things, such as color, shapes, object sizes, details, focal points, the effort you spend on areas of a painting, all kinds of stuff. It's incredibly versatile and can be applied to many things!

2da: And finally, what should we look out for from you in the future?

AP: Hopefully more art, more fun projects with my name on, and maybe one day one of personal my projects will turn into something substantial! I love working on games, so in the future I want to have great games under my belt which I felt like I had a

major impact on. As for my personal work, I just hope to keep developing my skills and refining the visions of my work. Maybe *The Reach* will turn into the game I envisioned one day! ●

Thank you Andy for chatting to 2dartist!

3DTOTAL'S ANATOMICAL COLLECTION:
NEW FIGURES AVAILABLE NOW

Affordable anatomical reference figures for traditional and digital artists, including male and female planar models and the impressive biosuit figure designed by Alessandro Baldasseroni!

The Artist

Alex Kuno
alexkunoartwork.com

Alex Kuno is a full-time traditional artist based in Minnesota, USA. He uses a wide variety of media to create his captivating, and unsettling, illustrations.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Drawing dark fairytales

Traditional artist Alex Kuno showcases his nostalgic illustrations and discusses their darker political undercurrents ▶

Just as Alex Kuno was struggling to articulate his political and cultural frustrations, he fortuitously inherited a collection of children's books from the 1920s and 30s. Inspired by the naïve exploration of the world shown in the illustrations of these books, he has gone on to explore in his own work the child-like urges of the apparently civilized modern world.

Over the years Alex has held numerous exhibitions and gained a dedicated following for his unusual, dark, yet whimsical works. This month Alex talks to us about his deep passion for his work, combining different materials to suit the illustrations he creates and his most challenging project to date…

2dartist: Hello Alex! Thanks for talking to 2dartist. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Alex Kuno: Hello! I'm a full-time artist currently living and working in the Lowertown Arts District of Saint Paul, Minnesota. I've been working on an ongoing series of satirical, apocalyptic fairy tales called the *Miscreants of Tiny Town* for almost ten years. My work has been exhibited primarily in cities around the US, but I'm currently showing a solo exhibit at the Dorothy Circus Gallery in Rome. I also regularly produce commissions for private collectors around the world, and show new work and experimental little side projects monthly for local audiences out of my studio

2da: Your works have a really strong sense of narrative to them, what is your thought process when you begin a new artwork?

AK: I usually don't think in terms of individual pieces, so much as bodies of work. So when I'm starting a new series I'll think about and research a particular overarching theme I want to explore and then decide what materials I'd like to focus on that fit best. Then I'll stare off into the distance for about a month, write a bunch of stream-of-consciousness notes and block out basic compositions with crude stick figure doodles on my iPad. This gives me a framework of ideas, while still being able to improvise when I finally start working.

2da: The style of your work is very reminiscent of traditional fairytale illustrations. How did you develop and adapt this style for your own work?

AK: The only thing creepier and darker than the concept of nostalgia is our culture's ability to manipulate it for cynical political or financial gain. I like playing with that disconnect. I've had lots of people come up to me over the years

● *Eurydice And The Asp*. Number two of five illustrations commissioned by the Dorothy Circus Gallery in Rome, 2016
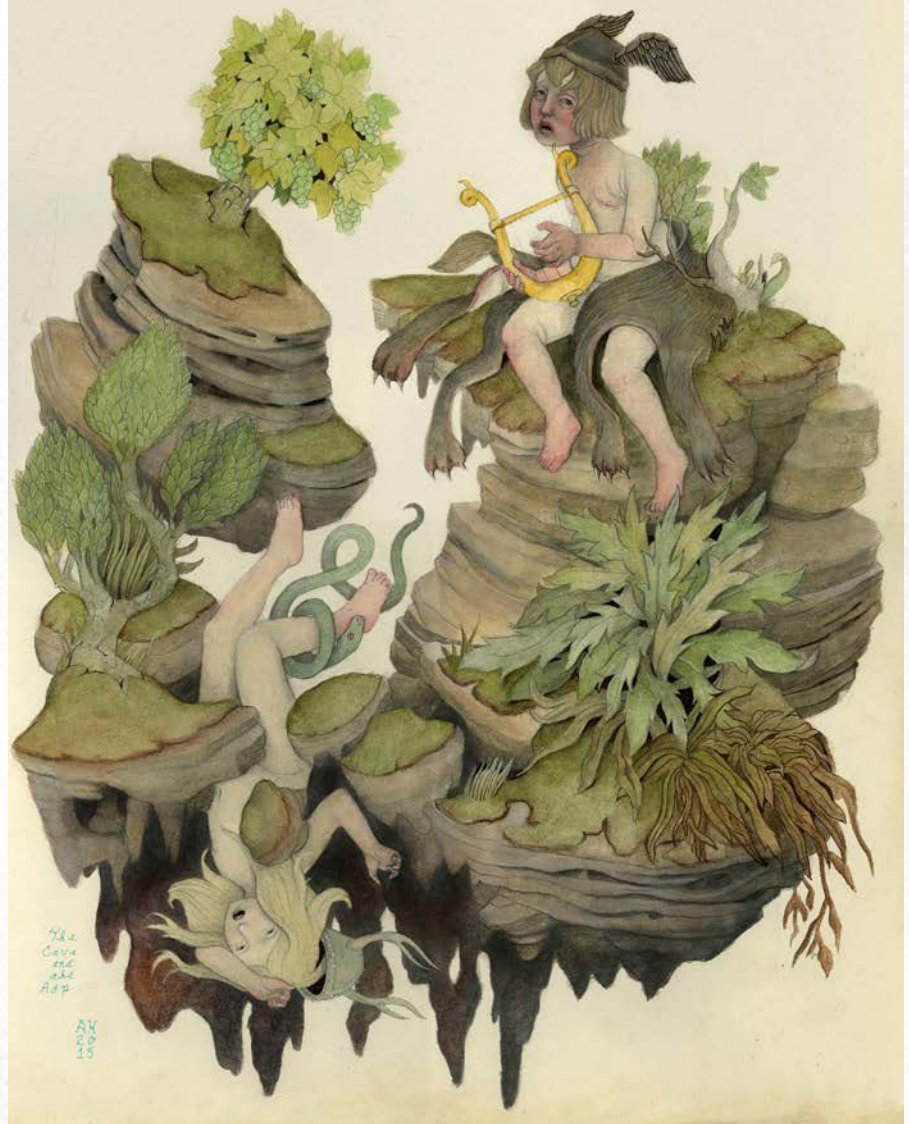
and say something like "this work reminds of something, but I've never seen it before." Anyway, I love looking at those eighteenth and nineteenth century illustrations; not just fairy tales, but also scientific and medical sketches, too. You're seeing that culture rediscover the world, and I try to bring that combination of naïveté and deliberation into my series.

2da: Many of your works, although whimsical, have a dark undercurrent; could you explain to us the ideas behind this recurring theme?

AK: Several years before I started the *Miscreants of Tiny Town* series, the Bush administration in the USA kept using terms similar to "bring evildoers to justice," and "the enemy hates our freedom," and so on. It struck me how so much of our "sophisticated" society is merely a collection of our own primal, child-like urges and fears. While

I was struggling how to articulate that visually, I inherited a small stack of children's books from the 1920s and 30s. The whimsically illustrated pages were all decrepit and discarded…If we don't blow this planet up, future generations are going to have a pretty good laugh at our expense.

2da: What are your favorite materials and tools to use, and why?

AK: I used to work primarily in oils, but when I started the *Miscreants of Tiny Town* series I wanted to get back in touch with the tools I used when I would obsessively draw as a kid. Ballpoint pens, crayons, markers, pencils; these tend to fit with the themes I was trying to get across.

As the series evolved I moved into acrylics on wood for a number of years, but over the past year or so I think I've settled into a combination of ▶

The God Zeus is Moved by Orpheus' Grief
AK 20 16

● *Zeus Is Moved By The Music Of Orpheus' Grief*. The fourth of five pieces commissioned by the Dorothy Circus Gallery in Rome, 2016

● *The Land That Keeps Us All*. **Another image from the** *Cryptopographies of Malthusia* **solo show at Saint John's University, 2015**

primarily graphite, watercolor, acrylic and ink on paper. There's something really comforting about that combination for me.

2da: Which materials, styles or techniques would you like to explore in the future?

AK: As my work becomes more illustrative, and I'm slowly veering the *Miscreants of Tiny Town* paintings into a series of books and prints, I'd love to have more time to learn about digital painting. But as wonderful as those tools are my lack of experience doesn't allow them to expand my creativity or imagination, rather, they immediately induce crippling decision fatigue.

Hmm, I wonder if there's some kind of online magazine that offers professional insights and tutorials for digital artists that I would be able to use as reference…

2da: Where do you generally find inspiration for your pieces?

AK: I'm constantly bewildered by the mythology surrounding the creation of America, so I'm fascinated by Revisionist history, global geopolitics, conspiracy theories and actual declassified conspiracies. I also listen to lots of podcasts while I work, and seeing work posted on social media by artists I admire keep whatever ego I have in check. They remind me how much work I have to do.

2da: Which other artists do you reference or look to for inspiration?

AK: The work of Northern Renaissance artists (van Eyck, Brueghel, Holbein and Dürer in particular) make my heart skip a beat every time I come across them. I'm also really drawn to the German

New Objectivity movement from the 1920s and 30s, and of course I constantly look up eighteenth and nineteenth century illustration styles. I'm also really inspired by the careers and brains of comedians such as Louis C.K., Dan Harmon, Paul F. Tompkins, and Steve Coogan especially.

2da: Can you talk us through a working day in the life of Alex Kuno? How do you manage your time as a freelancer?

AK: I paint from 11pm-5am, sleep for a few hours and then do emails/social media stuff during the day. I'll run errands, sleep for a bit, make dinner, then hang out with my girlfriend and cat for a while, before reading the news, sleeping some more, and then I start painting again.

After a show or deadline's finished I'll enjoy being a regular person for a week or so and get out of ▶

ALEX'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

This is a detail shot of one of the polymer clay figures I made for the *Children's Crusade* exhibition in 2013. Having never sculpted before, making these figures ultimately reconfigured how I have viewed my characters and compositions ever since. They weren't just figure paintings anymore; they were suddenly these tangible things that I could hold in my hand. When I picked them up as they were cooling from the oven, they even seemed to have body heat. Yeah, things took a weird turn there for a bit!

ALEX'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

● *City Of Burning Ears*.
**Graphite and acrylic
on paper, 2014**
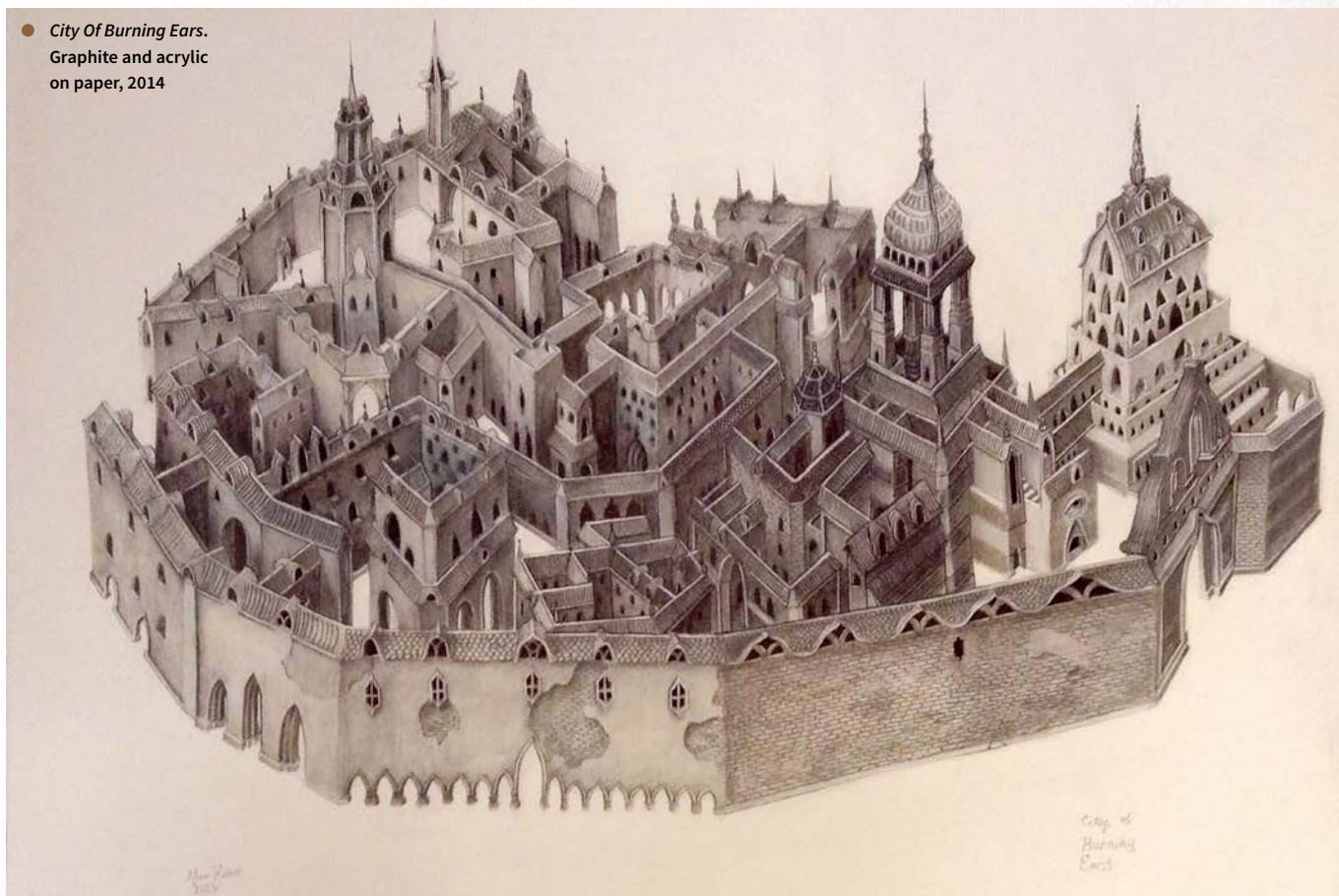
● *Yonder The Absconder (Detail)*.
Mixed media on paper, 2014

● *Arrival Of The Sparagmos*. The fifth piece commissioned by the Dorothy Circus Gallery in Rome, 2016

the house when I can so I don't go completely crazy. Although, I tend to get edgy if I don't have a project.

2da: What would you say has had the biggest impact on your work to date? Was there a moment of revelation or an important turning point in your career?

AK: I host open studio visits monthly and also for the local Art Crawl twice a year. It's not just a good source of income, but being able to meet fans and clients in person is totally invigorating and rewarding. It's helped me to stop caring about or waiting for that one big sale to change everything; it's just important for me morally to keep my prices as low as possible. I'd prefer that a waitress or a school teacher who really

● *Anticipation*. **Acrylic on wood, 2012**

● *Boys In The Big Boat Bandy About*. An illustration from the *Cryptopographies of Malthusia* solo show at Saint John's University, 2015

> **"Imitation is a necessary phase in learning, but you'll only improve if you learn to embrace and appreciate your creative or technical limitations"**

connects with my work be able to afford an original over some investment banker just looking to add to his collection.

2da: What have you found has been the most challenging aspect of working as a freelance artist so far?

AK: I started making art as my full-time job because I spiritually and mentally needed to, so making lots of money or being famous or whatever was never a priority. I'm making this up as I go along and in the process have made terrible decisions and took crazy risks to get off the ground.

So far, the trick is remembering that when sales are low, they'll pick up again. And no matter how great sales can be, they'll inevitably drop off. Keeping things in perspective is difficult when you're emotionally and financially dependent on something you're passionate about.

2da: What has been your favorite project or artwork to work on so far?

AK: In October 2013, I was asked to produce three simultaneous installations in different art studios in my neighborhood called *The Children's Crusade*. The installations consisted of over twenty hand-made polymer clay sculptures and large-scale 3D natural landscapes.

I did it alone with no funding and I suddenly had to switch two of the three locations ten days before the opening. It felt like a non-stop aneurysm but it miraculously turned out fine and I'm proud of the work, even if no one saw it. Maybe "favorite" isn't the right word, but it was a hell of a learning experience.

2da: Do you have any advice for readers wanting to develop their own work, or begin a career as a freelance artist?

AK: I heard a saying a while ago that goes something like this: an artist's style is all of the things that artist can't do. I think that's right. Imitation is a necessary phase in learning, but you'll only improve if you learn to embrace and appreciate your creative or technical limitations.

So, don't be too precious about your own work. Everything you do creatively is practice for your next piece. Even if you feel like you're making your masterpiece now, what you're learning in the process will make your project look ridiculous in comparison to the next one.

2da: When you are not creating your fascinating works, what do you like to do?

AK: I honestly can say that I truly love what I do; it's as much of a hobby and lifestyle as it is a career. So, a lot of my free time is spent thinking and daydreaming about this silly little fantasy land I'm working in.

I'm probably pretty unbearable to be around. In any case, I like cooking and trying new food, laying around watching movies with my very tolerant girlfriend and the cat. I travel when I can.

2da: And finally, what can we look forward to from you in the future?

AK: I've been working on shows non-stop for the past few years now, so I'm happy to finally be able to take a little time out to focus on projects that have been on the back burner since forever. I'm combining a selection of storylines and ideas I've had in my mind for a series of self-published picture books soon, as well as other printed material and online content.

I'm also working out some potential new shows in other galleries throughout Rome, so we'll see where that goes. I can't wait to finally see how all this new stuff shakes out this year! ●

Thank you Alex for talking to us this month!

"These tutorials not only provide interesting exercises for the beginner to help build a strong foundation for drawing and painting, but also provide important insights into the mindset of a concept artist. Very useful and inspiring!"

Lois Van Baarle (aka Loish)

Digital concept artist & animator | loish.net

beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop:

characters

Following on from the highly successful *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop*, this latest title explores the popular techniques used in character design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting: Characters is a comprehensive guide for artists wishing to create convincing and detailed characters. It features established artists such as Charlie Bowater (concept artist at Atomhawk) and Derek Stenning (freelance concept artist and illustrator, with clients including Marvel Entertainment and Nintendo) who share their industry experiences by covering such aspects as posing characters, choosing the correct costumes, conveying emotions, and creating suitable moods. Comprehensive step-by-step instructions – plus a quick tips section demonstrating how to paint elements that are integral to character design and a glossary covering essential Photoshop tools – make this an invaluable resource for those looking to learn new skills, as well as those pursuing the next level.

SIGN-UP TO THE 3DTOTAL **NEWSLETTER**

JADE MERE

Sketchbook

Discover the narrative inspired digital sketches of up-and-coming freelance illustrator and writer Jade Mere

The Artist

Jade Mere
jademere.deviantart.com

Jade Mere, based in the US, is an illustrator and writer. She currently works as a freelance illustrator while continuing to expand her portfolio and explore new painting techniques.

Explore Oscar's imaginative and creative world of ink and pencil sketches...

Sketching is a way to explore new ideas or improve old ones, without feeling the pressure to produce a completed, polished illustration. It is a way to get your ideas down and concentrate on the story and concept rather than focusing on achieving that perfect anatomy or rendering.

I was not born with a pencil in my hand. I did not start drawing until I was in high school. When I was a child, my older sister would excel in every subject, including art, and I always felt discouraged, so it wasn't until she moved out that I started drawing.

Even when I did start drawing, I wasn't good at it, and had to work very hard to improve. I did, however, make up fantastic stories and adventures when I was a child, playing games with elaborate back stories and characters of my own creation.

I believe that creativity resurfaced when I started painting. I realized I wanted to pursue a career as an artist when I joined social media sites and started putting my work up and watched other artists.

Since I didn't know any artists in real life, it was the first time I had the chance to interact with people who shared a common love of art, and I wanted to keep myself surrounded by those types of people. Now, instead of keeping a physical sketchbook, I keep a digital one. Every morning I start with a warm up sketch, 10-50 minute paintings where I try to get a concept down.

Inspiration and ideas

I've found inspiration in all the common places: watching an epic film, listening to a song as images flash in my head, reading a fantastic book, taking a walk in the woods or along the ocean. I never have a lack of ideas.

There are too many artists to list who have inspired me, from the classic works of John Singer Sargent to the beautiful renderings of Ruan Jia. My favorite artworks are those that hint at a story; single images that make me wish there was an entire book dedicated to telling the story of that one picture.

When it comes to searching for new artists, I don't spend much time in art galleries unfortunately, because of where I live. I do however spend a depressing amount of time of the internet, browsing digital galleries!

Most of my ideas pop into my head when I'm taking walks and listening to music. I'll quickly scribble down the idea, and then turn it into a thumbnail. A few weeks later, if the idea still excites me and if I'm able to get a pleasing composition out of it, I'll make it into a full illustration. I would say that only one out of every twenty ideas makes it into Photoshop and is rendered out.

Materials

There is a brilliant simplicity in the materials I use; a computer, Photoshop, and a Wacom Intuos 4 tablet. I learned to draw initially through traditional medias like paint and pencil, charcoal and canvas, but I love digital art. You don't need to wait for paint to dry, if you mess up or want to suddenly take your image in a new direction, you can just add a new layer or make adjustments.

I'm impulsive and often change how I want an image to look or feel, experimenting or exploring

● *Enthrall*, one of Jade's canine sketches
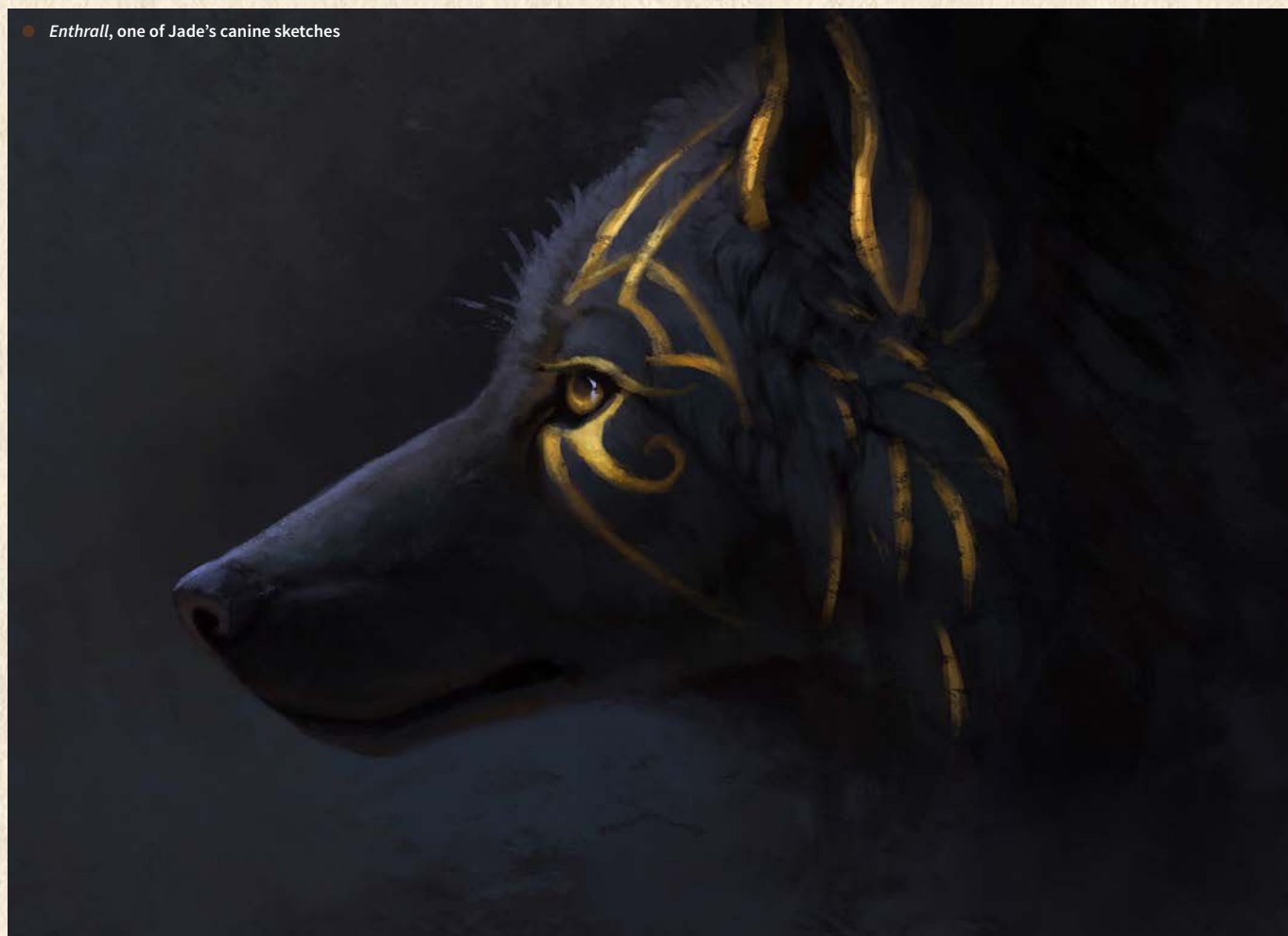
● A personal work, *False Sun*

"I have never seen a Photoshop brush successfully replace knowledge of art fundamentals"

as I go. I love how easy it is to push and pull your image in Photoshop, try out a new light source, or play around with object placement.

I admit, there is something pleasing about a traditional brush and paint, but I'm just not a patient person. After two hours of setting up my workspace to paint traditionally I'm ready for a break. With my computer, I turn it on and I am ready to go. I also get paint everywhere when I paint traditionally, and just don't have the space for a proper studio.

That aside, I do occasionally work with brush pen and ink. That, along with watercolor painting, are areas I would like to explore more.

Sketching techniques
When I start sketching, I usually drop down some colors quickly. Sometimes I do start in grayscale, but other times in color. Typically, I will go straight to color for sketches and start in grayscale for more completed works.

No matter if I'm sketching or painting a full illustration, I always work from big to small. I

⚡ PRO TIP
....
Consistency with variety
I have found the more successful artists are the ones who discover what they really love to paint and stick to it. They develop a consistency not only in style and subject matter, but they also produce and upload new art on a regular basis. If you love creature design, do that. If you love portrait drawing, focus your energy there. On the flip side, don't get stuck drawing the same pose or subject matter or idea over and over so your entire gallery looks the same. Vary something about your work, be it the lighting, subject, media, and so on.

block in large forms of light and shadow, saving any kind of detailing for later.

I start with line art a lot of the time, but always discard it after the initial block in. Sometimes ideas just don't work. It's essential that artists know when to take a step back from their work, either start over or go back to a place in their history when it was working.

If the overall composition or the large shapes don't look good, no amount of zooming in and detailing will save it. It wasn't until I started taking online classes through Schoolism that I realized tiny details weren't the key to creating successful images. Rather, the key is to properly plan your colors, light, and other compositional elements which give your paintings life.

I started at a traditional art school and, due to my circumstances, had to drop out. But I continued my education online. I do not think you have to attend art school to become a great artist, but you do have to dedicate the time, and find the discipline to seek out a well-rounded education. I'm a firm believer in learning the fundamentals and working from life.

The number one question I see digital artists being asked is "What brushes do you use?" I have never seen a Photoshop brush successfully replace knowledge of art fundamentals. In terms of my plans for the future, I have a few personal goals. In general, I would like to continue to push my compositions and lighting to create ever more appealing images.

● *Moon Tears*, a personal sketch

⚡ JADE'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

Lava Tiger

I started thinking about making animals abstract to create something that goes beyond a basic portrait. I particularly love the abstract markings on big cats. Not only did painting this inspire other similar images to come, but it also made me realize it doesn't take a perfectly rendered or detailed image to captivate an audience. I love making simple images like this, sketches that take under an hour to complete but have some kind of emotional statement to make.

JADE'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

Lava Tiger

The final version of *Tiger Lily*
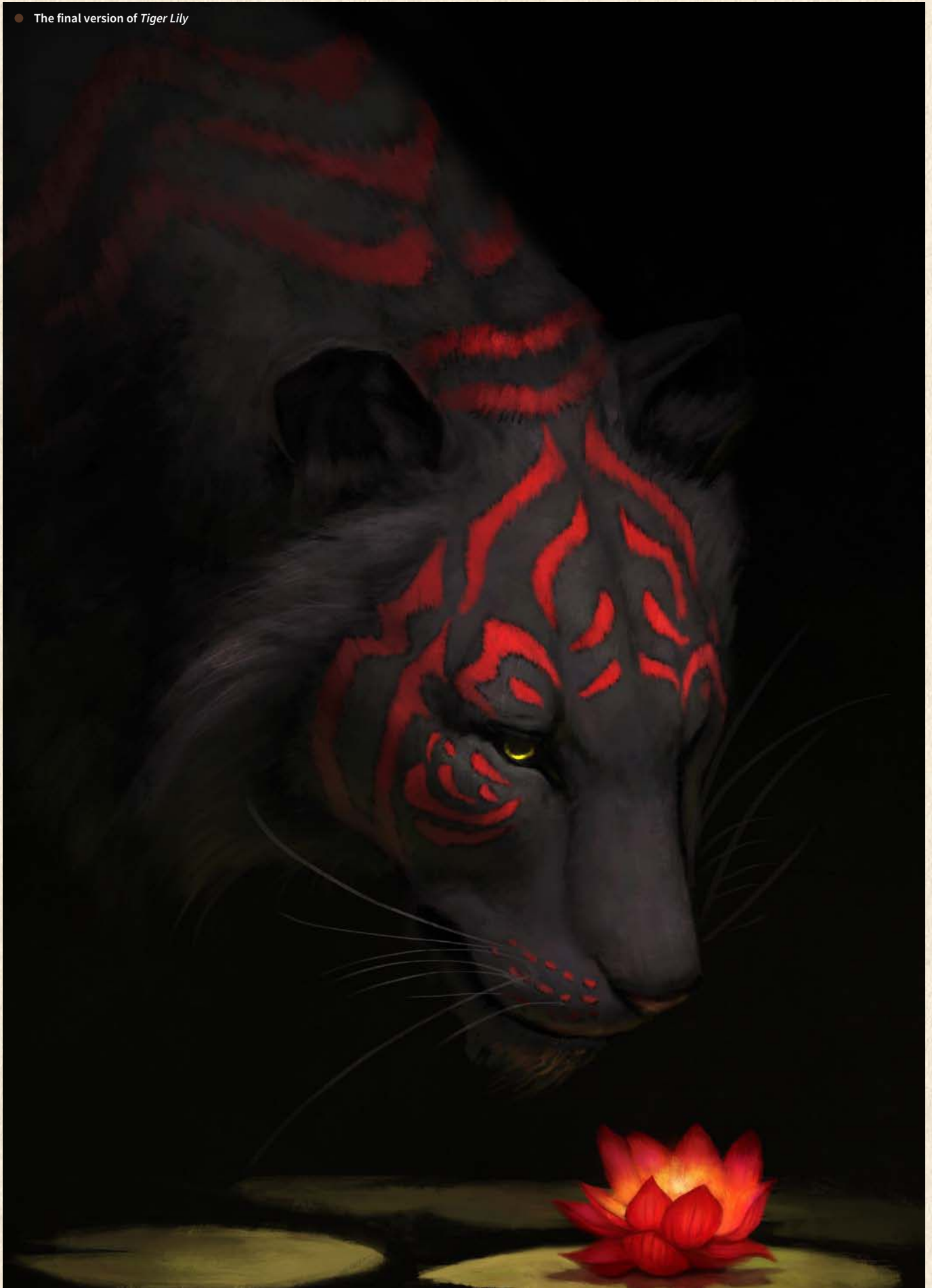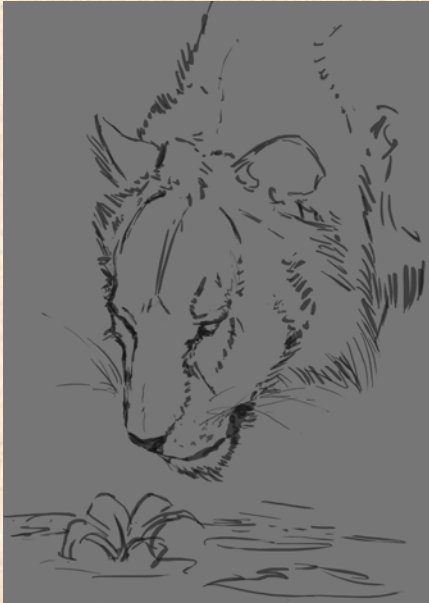
● After thumbnail compositions, Jade gets an idea in place with rough lines
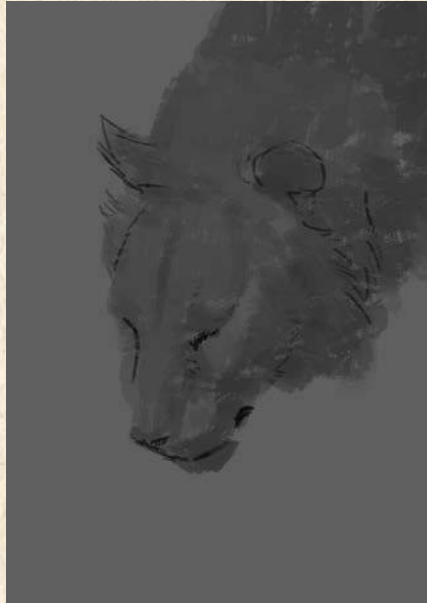
● Very lightly, Jade blocks in a basic shape

● Jade adjusts the values and drop in lights and darks

● Jade then refines the lighting and adds some color variation

● Jade adds secondary elements

● Once all elements are working, Jade adds details and cleans up

⚡ PRO TIPS

Paint from life

If you love drawing animals, hang out at a zoo, or go to the dog park, or steal your neighbors cat for a few hours (don't actually steal your neighbor's cat). It's true, you can't always find what you want to draw in real life, and sometimes you have to rely on photo reference. But when you can, try to do studies from real life.

Exercise and eat healthy

As artists it's easy to stock up on energy drinks high in sugar and lock ourselves in our room for hours. But our brains need good fuel to function as well as physical movement. Fruits and vegetable, walking and fresh air. Sure, it's not some industry secret revealing the download link to the perfect brush pack, but the greatest tool you have as an artist is your mind and body. Take care of them, be healthy, and be happy!

● *Flight*, part of a personal project

● *Farewell*, a personal sketch
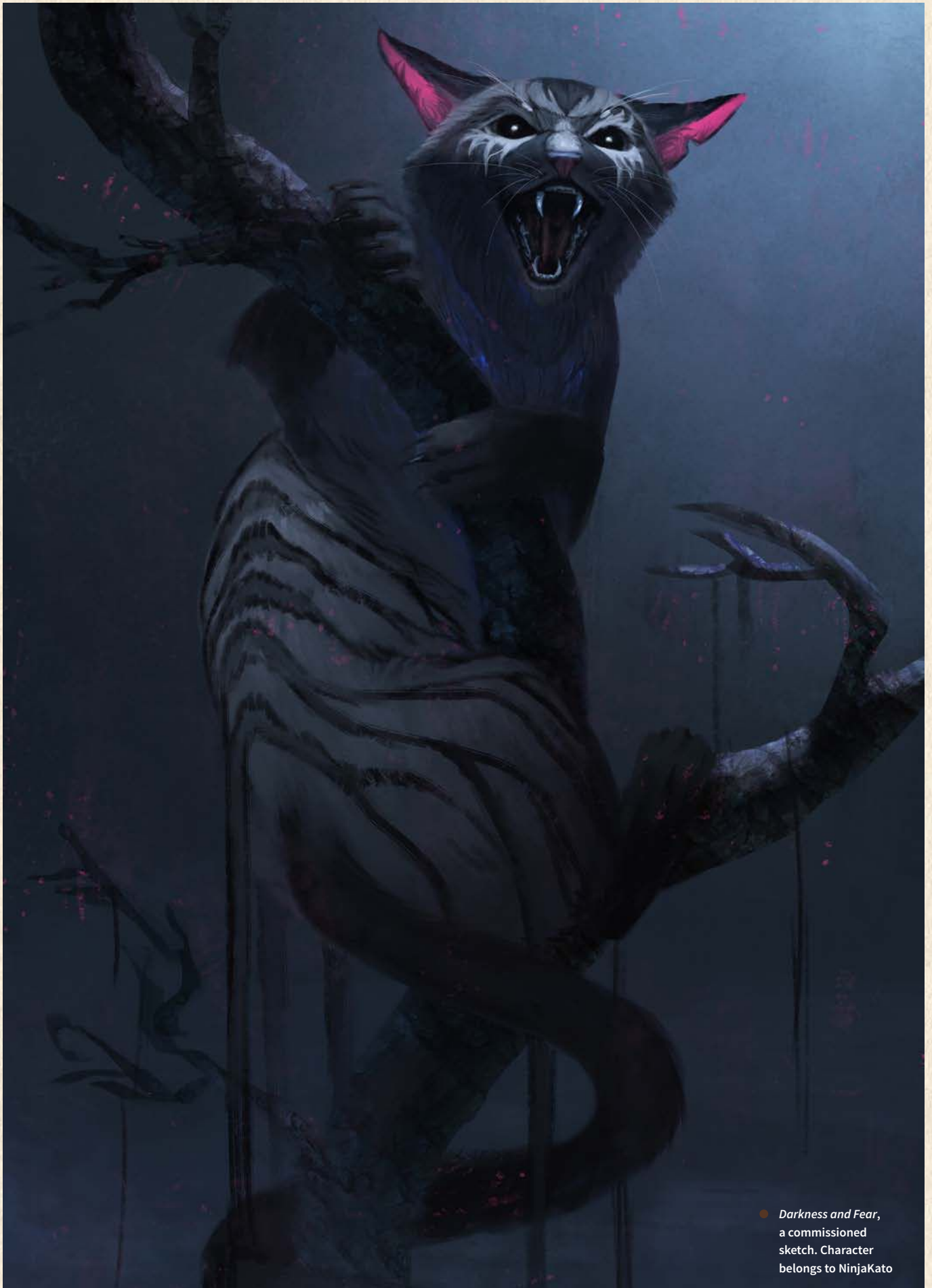
Darkness and Fear, a commissioned sketch. Character belongs to NinjaKato

2dartist

Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists and their artwork to adorn the pages of our magazine. If you think you have what it takes, get in touch!

To submit, simply email Annie at **annie@3dtotal.com** with a selection of your images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a little information about you.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Art **Gallery**

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!

Ambush
Nikolay Moskvin
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/nik_moskvin

Submit your images! Simply email **annie@3dtotal.com**

Paladin
Sergey Musin
Year created: 2016
Web: samfx.com

Mikaela
Magdalina Dianova
Year created: 2016
Web: magdalina.artstation.com

Castaway
Tomas Honz
Year created: 2016
Web: tomashonz.com

Girl
Carlos Alberto Martínez
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/xenux

ARMORED
BLACKSHEEP 22
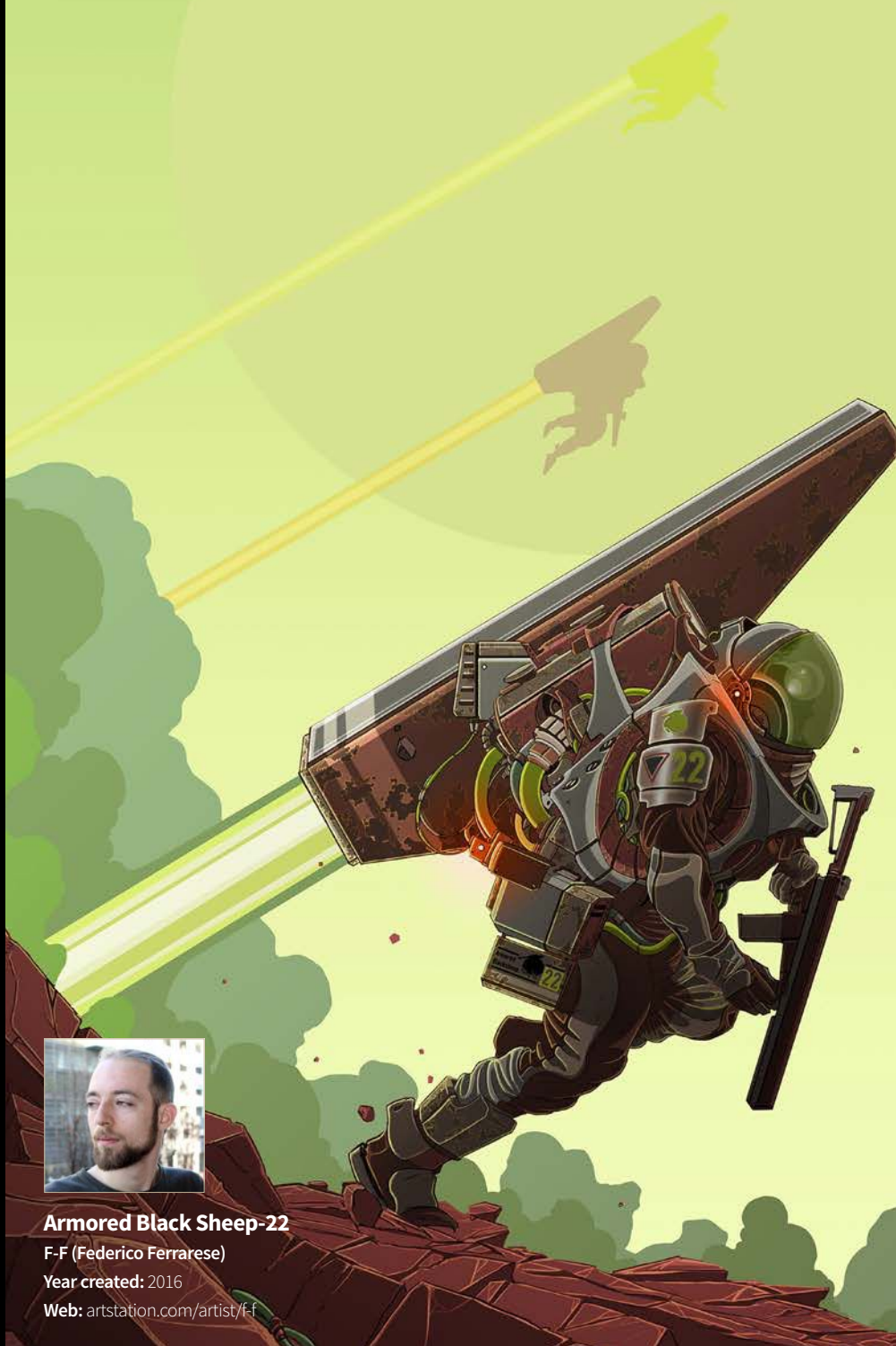
Armored Black Sheep-22
F-F (Federico Ferrarese)
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/f-f

Ananiel, Angel of Storms
Peter Mohrbacher
Year created: 2016
Web: angelarium.net

MOHRBACHER15
angelarium.net

Magical Forest 2
José Julián Londoño Calle
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/
handsdigitalstudio
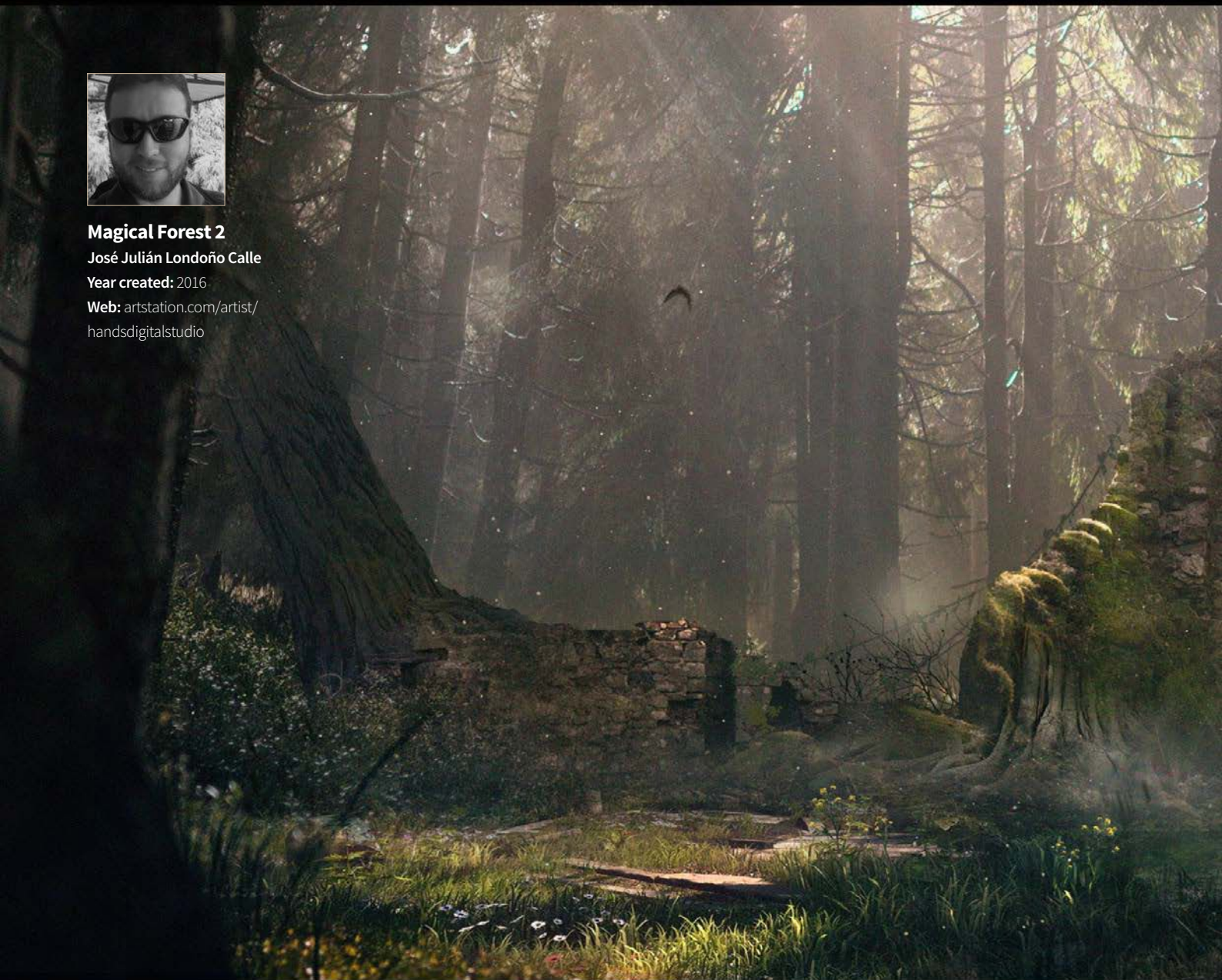
The Origami Master
Aekkarat Sumutchaya
Year created: 2016
Web: facebook.com/webang111
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Webang111

SKETCH JOURNAL

A travel-sized artistic solution to enable you to carry the tools, inspiration, and advice you need to keep a daily record of your life.

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The Artist

Stephanie Cost
stephaniedraws.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Stephanie is a New York transplant living in Seattle, USA. She loves to explore the city and surrounding forests and incorporates both into her artwork. Stephanie currently freelances as an illustrator.

Speed painting the Northern Lights

Stephanie Cost shows you how to use traditional art fundamentals to create a digital abstract painting of the Northern Lights ▶

Find out how to use mark-making techniques to quickly paint digitally…

This tutorial will follow the creation of an environmental piece inspired by the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights. We'll be using just a few Photoshop layers and focusing heavily on traditional art fundamentals such as composition, color theory, and the balance between chaotic and orderly elements. We'll also touch on different ways to utilize references in the best possible way, and how to evaluate scale and value to achieve dramatic impact. Included with the tutorial are all the Photoshop brushes that I've used, as well as my reference photographs. You can download them by clicking the icon at the start of this tutorial.

While I'll be talking about the virtues of a few of my favorite Blending Modes and Photoshop features, the emphasis of this tutorial will very much be on emulating a traditional drawing or painting project. You'll learn to love reductive, as well as additive, mark-making (negative space and layer masks are beautiful things) and a few techniques for building up luminosity through various types of brushes and unexpected color selections.

Although this project focuses on an atmospheric phenomenon that can be abstracted easily into light and shapes, it's my hope that by going through the process you'll be encouraged to apply the technique to all kinds of themes and subject matter. Abstraction and design are present in all art; learning to look at things in different ways is one of the most valuable skills that we as artists can exercise.

01 **Creating thumbnails:** To start off you should make some quick thumbnails to get several unique compositions. I choose to do this with some paper and a gold gel pen; you can do this or use Photoshop. You will need to photograph or scan your thumbnails and import them into Photoshop. To develop the thumbnails further use a round brush with a high contrast of texture built in to it – I use one with concrete or dirt. Start with loose, broad, and fun strokes with a minimum of stress attached to the brainstorming process.

It is important to research the topic before you begin. It can be very difficult, but essential, to choose just one idea to focus on early in the process. I often struggle with the urge to revise a project halfway through, so I find taking this approach lets my brain exhaust all the possibilities that might later crop up and demand too much attention. You can always make more pieces later on with the rejected thumbnails. ▶

01 **Texture and shape variety are naturally fascinating to our eye – it's important to let yourself be playful throughout the process**

01
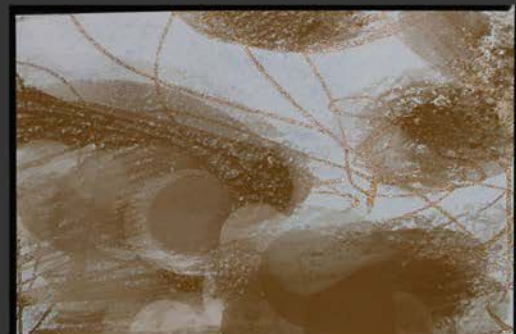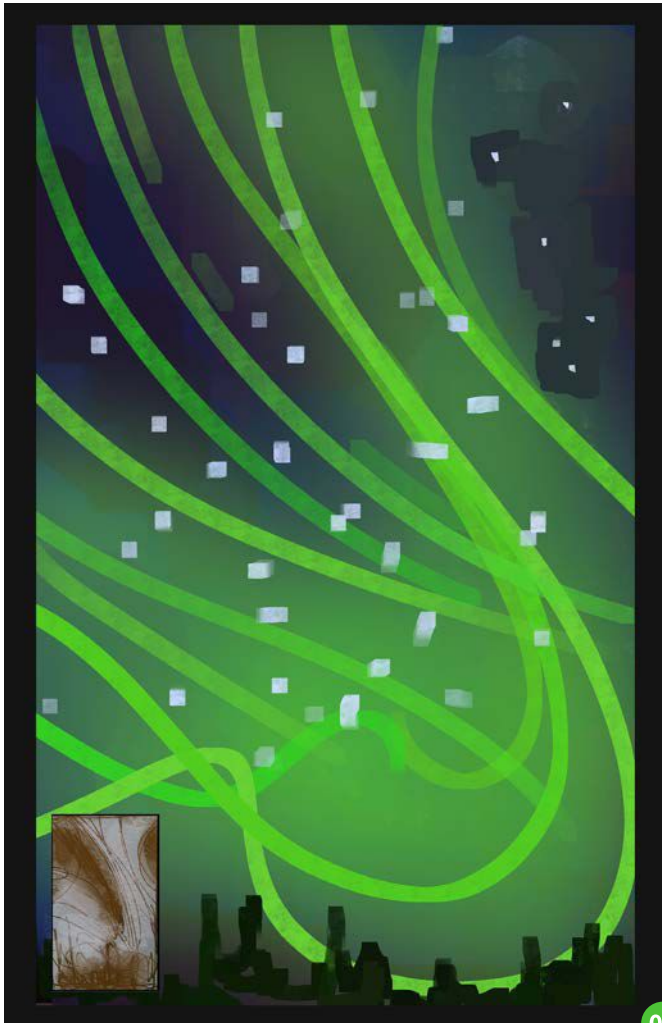
02 The rough idea: With the thumbnails finished, select one to work with. Keep this thumbnail in a locked layer at the top of your layer stack. With such an abstract idea you can rely on motion and energy, and try not to let your work become too "stiff".

Use a combination of a square, textured brush and a soft airbrush to rough in your idea, gestural lines, as well as some scale and lighting. This may look clumsy, but atmosphere and impact can be difficult to infuse into a piece later on. I always like to start with a bold, vibrant plan.

Although my colors may become more complex, they work best when simplified into a majority that are similar and one or a few that contrast sharply; this applies to hue, value, and saturation. Here you can add in some large white star placeholders and a dark tree line, both of which will increase interest to the composition.

03 Variety in mark-making: I have created two new brushes that I have named "AURORA swoosh" and "color BLOCK". They both have a small percentage of Hue Jitter (Bushes > Brush Presets > Color Dynamics). Both of these

⚡ PRO TIPS

Use yourself as a reference

Using references is invaluable; it isn't about speed (though it can save you endless frustration) but rather infusing your work with believable details and flaws, colors and lighting effects. Pulling information from multiple sources is ideal. Don't depend heavily on a specific image or pose. With anything organic, reference photography adds a wonderful unpredictability while keeping your marks within the realm of the naturally-occurring and believable (even for a fantasy setting). Use yourself as reference – it's fun and hilarious. Use the unexpected – engine parts and draping sheets for scenery, human hair for atmospheric phenomena, and so on.

Boldly use color

There are endless ways to use color, and while there's nothing wrong with a neon palette it is always a good idea to understand color theory "rules" before breaking them. Read up on how to mix acrylic or oil paint pigments. There is a lot of valuable information to be gleaned from the ways artists desaturate their colors by adding complements instead of black or gray, and it's fascinating to learn how certain colors activate others. Above all, experiment. Draw directly with color and constantly take risk. Rely on your intuition and on what you notice yourself drawn to visually.

brushes mimic the different ways I use traditional pastels. They also introduce unexpected colors to the vibrancy of the image because of the way close hues seem to vibrate when placed next to each other.

Don't erase anything; instead treat the foreground and background as one image. Try to work organically, you may find switching layers to be distracting. Working "flat" like this also helps with color blending; you can try my technique

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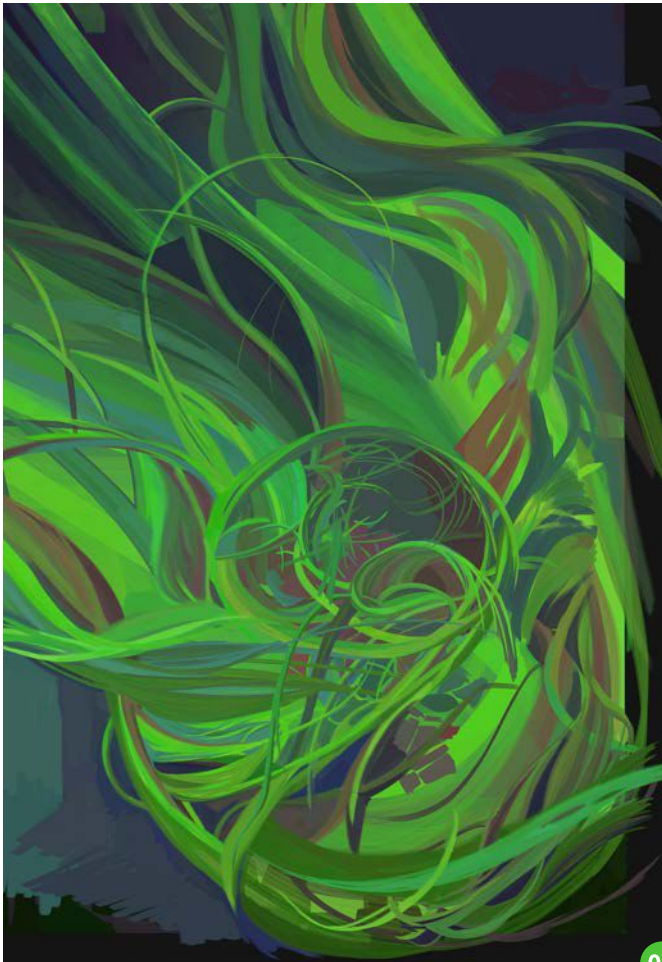
05

"Having spots where the eye can rest makes paintings much more inviting and serves the same purpose as quiet passages in music"

– paint a stroke with light pressure, color-pick the resulting shade, and then undo. Bouncing between positive and negative spaces is much like pushing physical pigment around on a canvas. Remember to utilize your references, you can use mine or take your own

04 **Loose but effective reference use:** Now focus on creating an organic knot of lines that have just the right balance of chaotic and cohesive. Use the NL Key Shift brush (from my brush pack) as it has a hard wedge with a softer tail and has some Hue Jitter. I like to keep my reference photos close to hand when drawing, this allows me to rotate and expand multiple photos to pick out the areas I need. Let your eye jump between areas; try to focus on precision over accuracy (it's more effective to let the photos show you precisely how light plays off a cluster, instead of trying to do it from memory). Don't worry about realism; instead focus on keeping the clumps from becoming too uniform in size, direction, or color.

05 **Blocking in the rest space:** Rest spaces are places that allow the viewer's eye to rest – in this piece they are chunks of night sky. Create these with flat spaces in two different colors (skies always vary from the horizon to the top of the "dome"). I'm still walking the line between abstraction and believability. Having spots where the eye can rest makes paintings much more inviting and serves the same purpose as quiet passages in music.

Use the wedge brush to carve around the green strands and thus make them stand out and break up the silhouette. The background has now completely obscured the original stars and tree placeholders, but don't worry too much about the specific placement for now, as they were more to show the impact they will have on your final image. I am using a border around my composition here, which allows for a fluid start and finish of my brushstrokes.

06 **Overlapping segments and flyaway strokes:** You might find it useful to split your image into a few different layers; this will allow you to safely make mistakes without being over cautious. Fill in the unrendered gaps using the NL Key Shift brush and a simple round brush – both taper nicely with pressure sensitivity turn
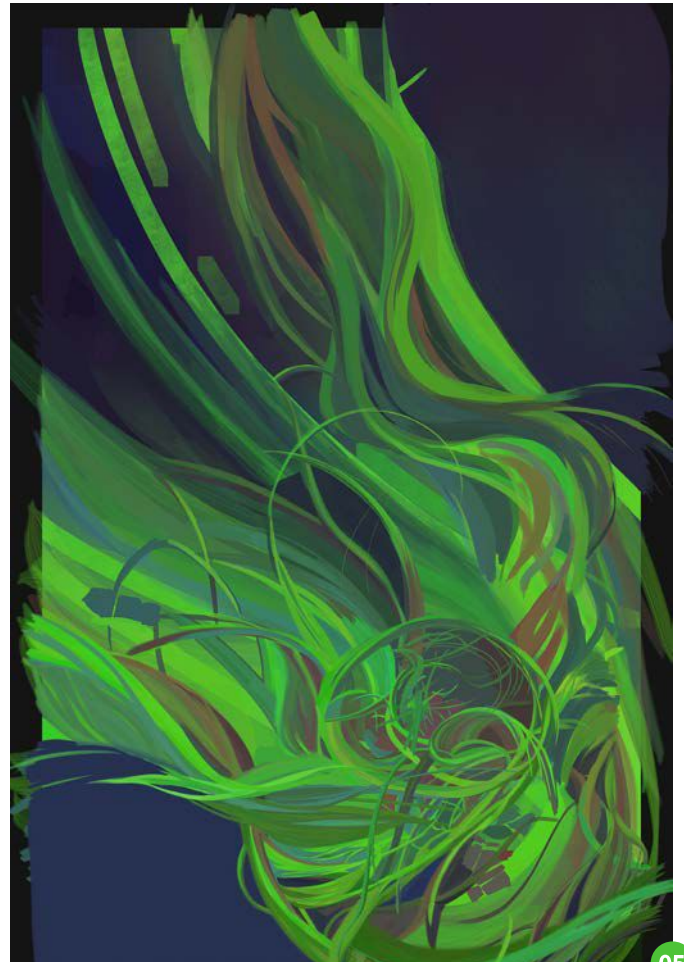
on. Use the references to see how the masses overlap each other and refine the boundaries of the larger silhouette. Make sure the darker and unusual colors become part of the pattern (carry the reddish strand through and incorporate the background color in more small chunks of negative space throughout). It's tempting to add in brighter and brighter greens, which can lead to over doing the highlights; instead try to explore muted blues and purples that make the green ▶

02 The piece is already different from the thumbnail but you can still see the strong vertical drop and a diagonal billow

03 Introduce a subdued shade of red but try to keep its ratio to the green colors quite low

04 Keep your marks quick but try to get the perfect gestural line – avoid obvious tangents

05 The buffer edges, which will later be eliminated, help to prevent tangents with the edge of the painting

stand out by contrast. Desaturated colors add a sense of mass and atmospheric perspective, even in an abstract piece.

07 **Selective softening:** I made another brush called NL Frankensquare. It is a soft brush that can be used and controlled like the edge of a sponge. In a new layer use this brush to make long gestural curves that mirror the first green marks made in the rough composition (Step 02). Your goal is to balance hard with soft; small marks with big ones; and flatness with luminosity. Be careful to follow the strong green arcs so as not to confuse the viewer about where to look. Now add a layer mask to clean up the lines because if you soften every area then it will lose its impact; use the same brush and for subtlety, set the layer mode to Lighten at 57% Fill.

08 **Stars and mood:** Now you can add some stars, with a quick internet search you can find a royalty-free image of the galaxy to use as a photo texture. Expand and rotate the image until it is the size and alignment you want – this will mostly involve making sure the points of light aren't too distracting. Use the Healing Brush to mask stars that are too big or bright, and make
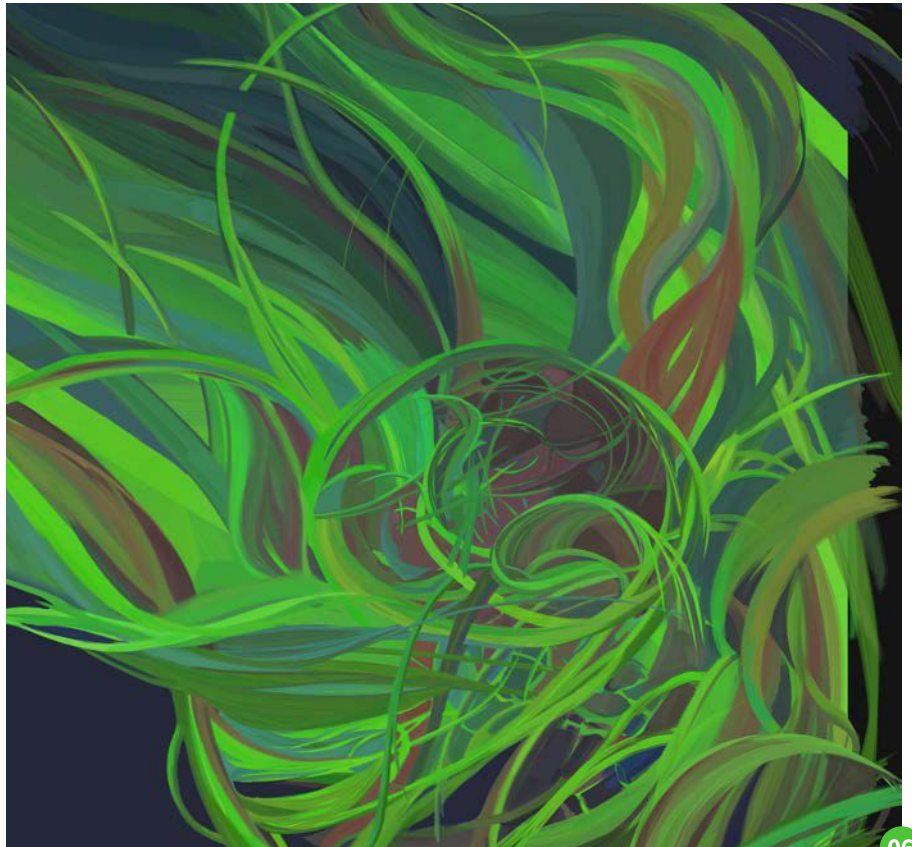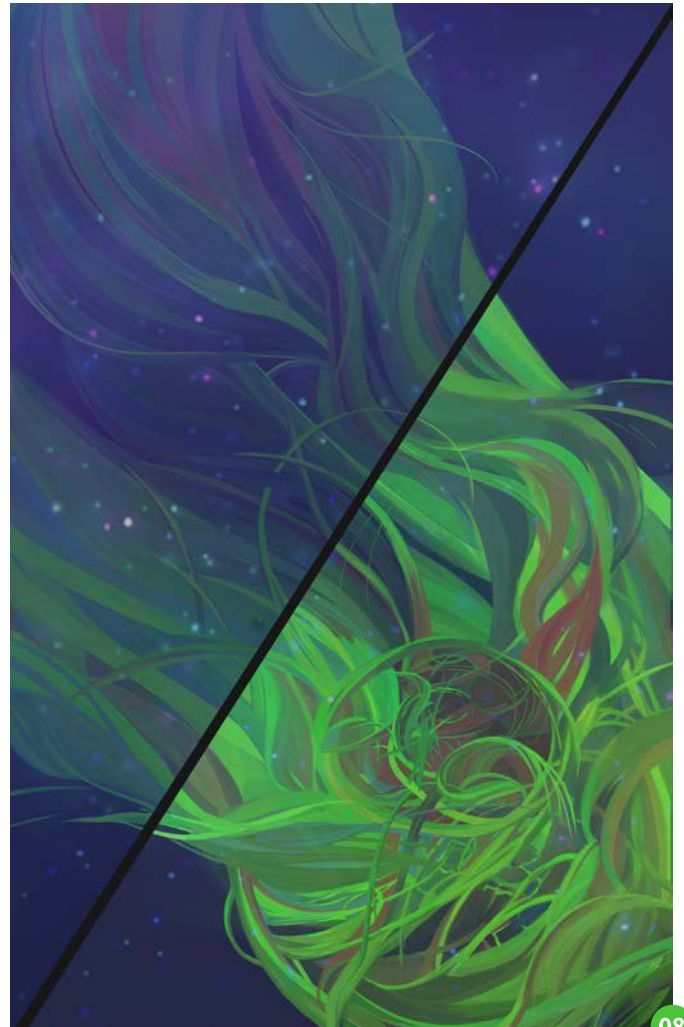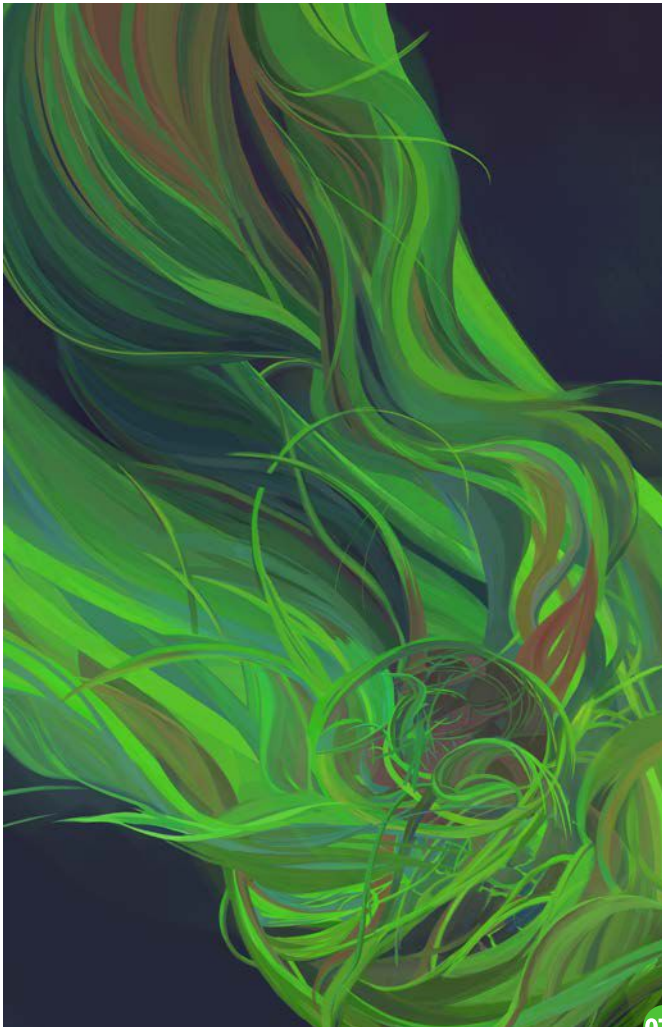
06

07a

07b

08

a round yellow moon on its own layer- it doesn't matter where. Now simply drag the moon around to different spots and evaluate the effect on the overall piece; I personally want it to echo the round knot of lines because it won't compete with that existing point of interest, so I place it and mask away to layer it within the green strands. To make your moon pop set the blending mode to Hard Mix and decrease the Fill to 68% - this allows the background to be visible and gives it an ▶

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06 Add details with as few lines as possible; to add interest carve out what you already have with negative space

07a Long, gestural curves to soften some of the hard strokes and the layer mask to clean up the lines

07b The painting so far with the softening brushstrokes and layer mask on top

08 A photo texture adds variety and depth; done correctly it is unobtrusive. Here is a before and after, from adding the Lighten mode

sure to expand the picture to cover the entire piece – you want the piece to be cohesive. A low-fill opaque or gradient layer could also work. To keep with the previous effect, set the Fill to 56% and the layer's blend mode to Lighten.

09 **The moon:** The initial composition lacks an initial draw for the viewer's attention, which is necessary for a dynamic piece in the same way areas of rest are for the eye. Use the Elliptical Marquee Tool and a hard brush to draw

otherworldly quality. On another layer use my NL Airbrush brush to add a subtle yellow glow.

10 **Grounding the piece:** Currently the piece is floating in space and sitting at an awkward tangent against the bottom frame, so it's time to bring back the tree line. You can use a "carving away" method with negative space to emulate the stark, linear shapes of pine trees. On a new layer with a mask, use the NL Key Shift brush to draw in your trees. You don't want them to be too segmented and steal attention away from the main subject matter. On another layer use the NL Swirly Box brush – it has swirls within a box – to place textured squares to tone down the stark tree lines without compromising the value range. For color complexity set both layers to Hard Light and decrease their Fill slightly, to 90% – this adds some visual interest but not too much distraction. ●

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09 The theme of the painting (the northern lights) and the initial draw (the moon) are separate but cooperating elements

10 Sometimes the immensity of an element can be enhanced by obscuring its limits, leaving the full size to our imaginations
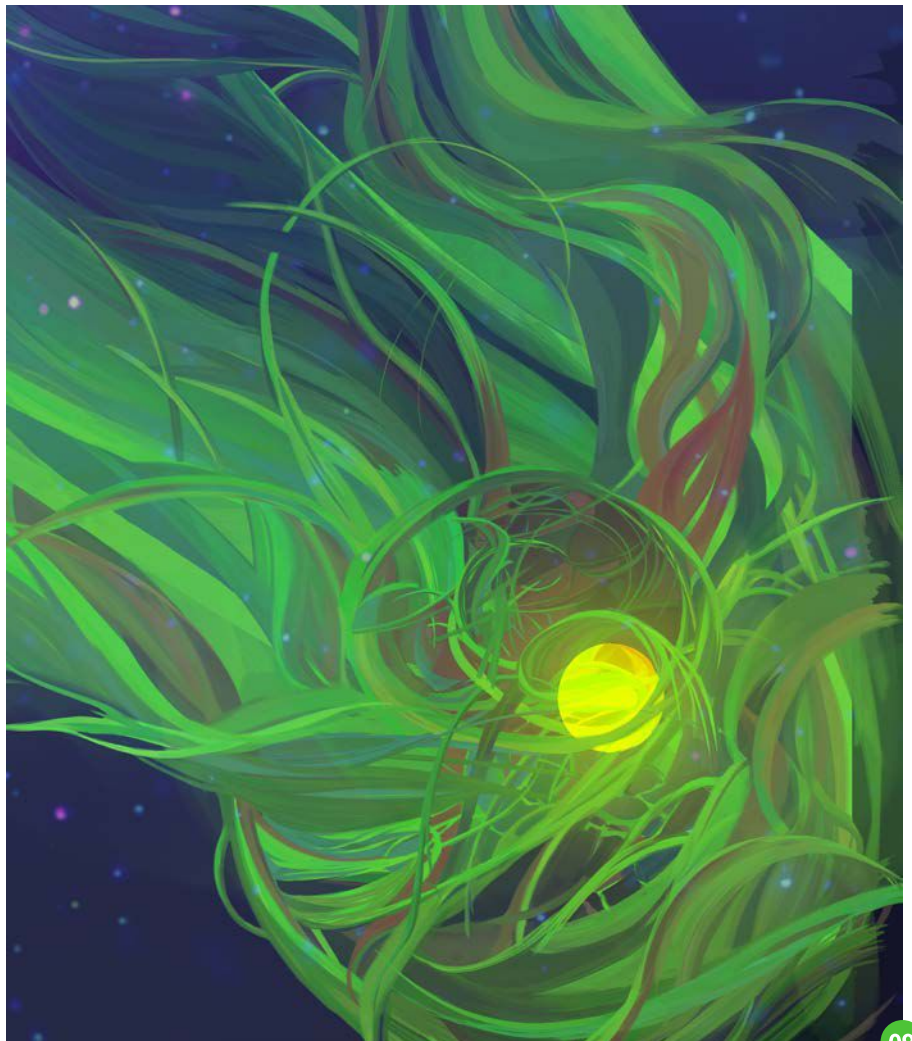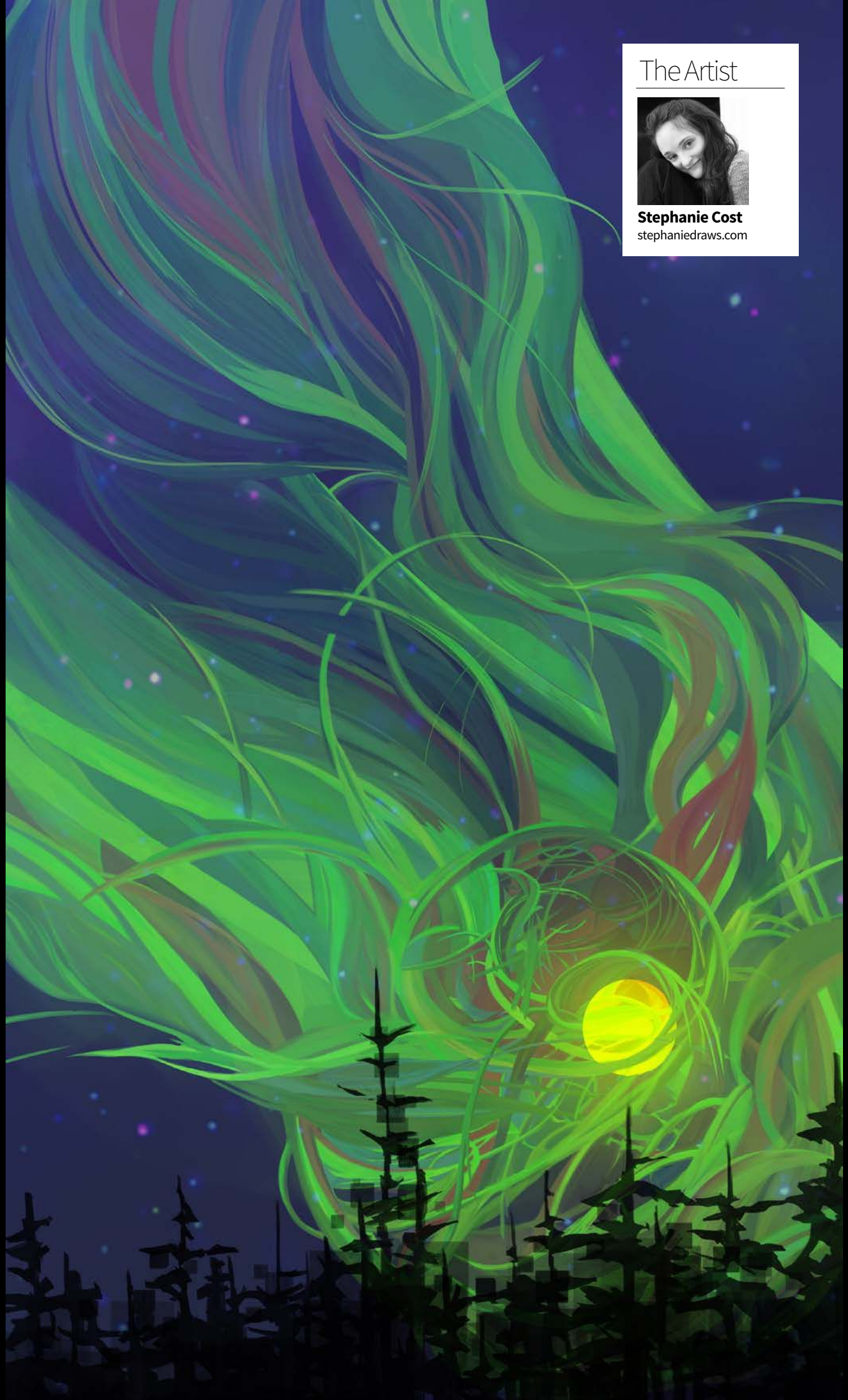
The Artist

Stephanie Cost
stephaniedraws.com
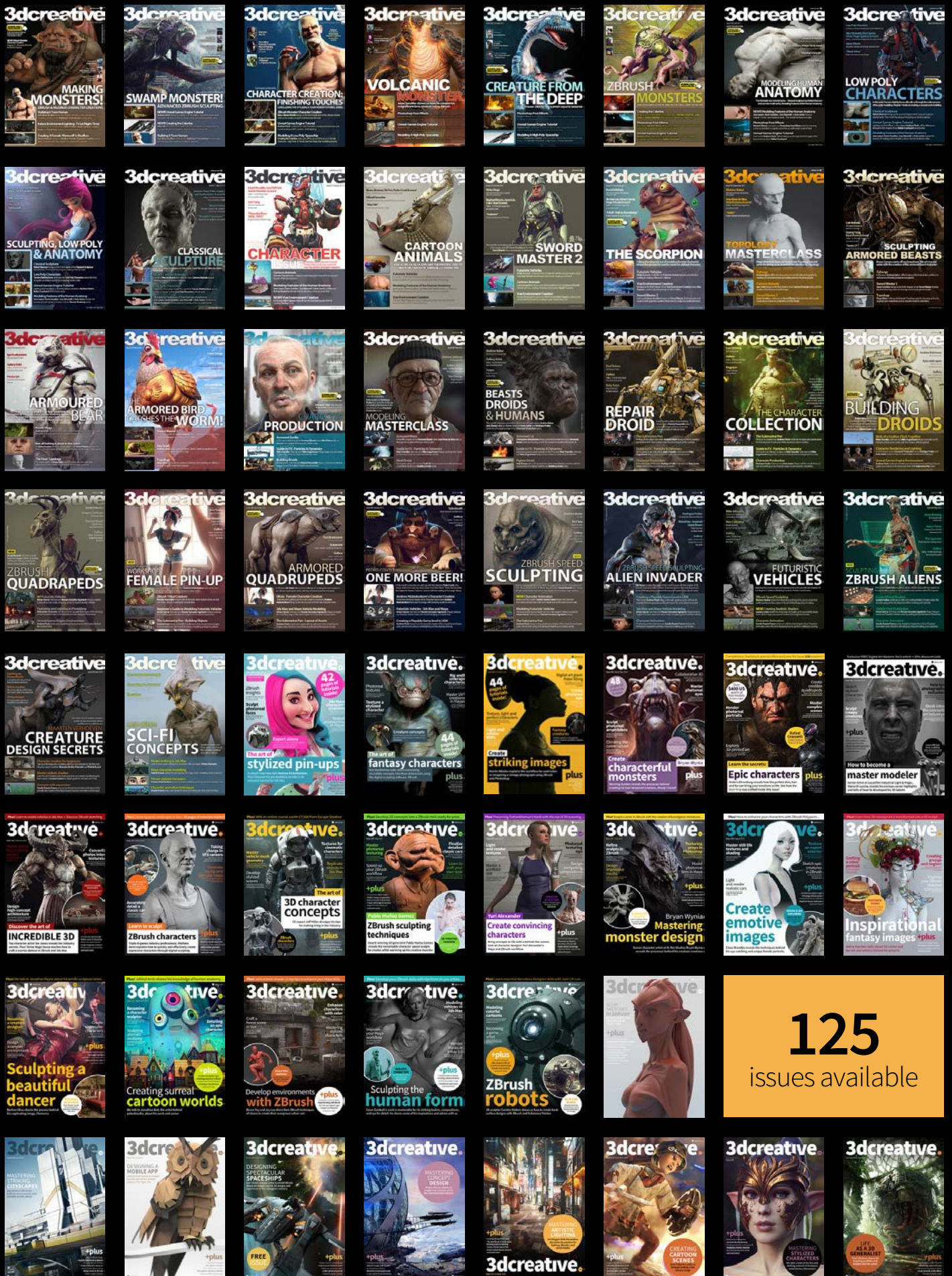
The Artist

Caroline Gariba
carolinegariba.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Caroline Gariba is a
freelance illustrator
from São Paulo, Brazil.
She studied advertising
before discovering
digital painting, and
has since worked
for clients including
Fantasy Flight Games
and Passion Pictures.

Tell stories through painting

Caroline Gariba shows how to design and paint a fantasy scene
with a strong scene of narrative ▶

Let the image do the talking...

One of the biggest gifts of being an artist is the ability to tell stories without using words. Every line of your pencil, and every stroke of your brush carries an intention; they mean to say something. The more you create a background story for your character or scene, the more easily and quickly you will be able to produce a new piece of art. Being able to fully understand the storytelling in a scene is the key to achieving the best results in these sorts of illustrative pieces.

This is similar to the processes actors use to interpret their characters masterfully, but in this case you are limited to producing a static image, and that is why you will have to be more accurate in your concept.

To start, let's do a quick exercise: Imagine you get a new brief to paint a beautiful royal woman in a wonderful and extravagant gown, using some magical lights, expensive fabric and lots of sparkle. From there you can start to sketch out a few different ideas to help you pin-point things that will set a profile for your character. Is she a good or a bad person? What exactly is she? Is she a queen? A princess?

Stepmother? Counselor? Where is she? In the ballroom? Reading books in the bedroom? Is she appreciating the flowers of the garden? Or planning to poison the King?

In this tutorial I will help you learn how to make the right choices for constructing the best storyline, how to work with silhouettes and how to find the best one. I will also show you how colors can be used to create an atmosphere which will turn your painting into a magical and breathtaking illustration.

01 **Refine your idea:** Once I have spent some time thinking about who this character will be, I decide to carry on the brief with the idea that my charming royal woman will be a bad girl. She will be refined, but full of envy and evil plans. Now it's time to play around with ideas, and think about what she would be doing to show this side of her character. Maybe she could be playing with a magical dagger, or uttering some black magic.

At this point, I like to work with pencil on paper because I feel more comfortable sketching in this way, but if you want to start directly using digital sketching that's okay too. You can sketch in Photoshop by going to New > New document >

A3. I like to use an A3 or larger document because the larger size allows me to work on the details in the piece. Now press Cmnd (or Ctrl if you are using a PC)+Shift+N to get a new layer or just click on the Paper icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. I usually pick a basic round brush from the Brush Tool selection (B) for this part of the process, as the objective is to be quick and not too detailed.

02 **Thumbnails:** If you have never drawn thumbnails for an artwork before, do it! It brings so many advantages to work out how your scene will look; it clarifies your ideas allowing you to make quick tests and see what works and what does not. So many times our mind plays tricks on us and thumbnails will help you to see all the forms that make up your image in the right way.

In this case, I am making some camera tests and composing the objects of the scene, to try to quickly reach the best values of the image. To make things easier later on, it's nice to create a new layer (Ctrl/Cmnd+Shift+N) to use as a palette color. I like to put in this layer the light gray, medium gray, dark gray (almost black), as I will use these three tones to separate the different parts of the image in character, foreground and background. You can create a new layer for each


01
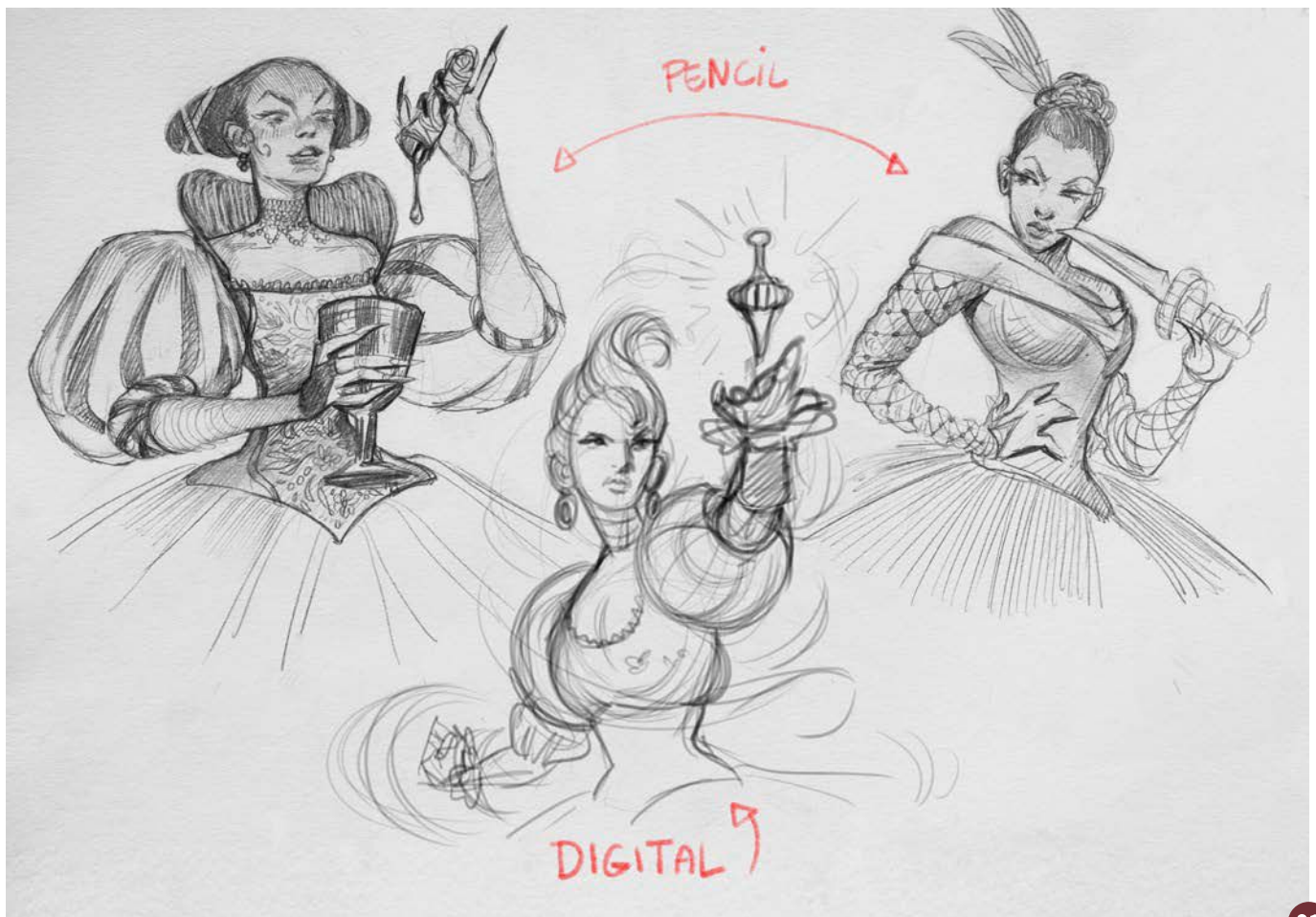
thumbnail too, and rename each layer by double-clicking on the layer name to save confusion.

03 Check the silhouette: It is a good idea to check at this point if the character is transmitting all the information you want to get across to the viewer. Silhouettes are a great way to do this as they allow you to see the general shape of the character. If you want to emphasize something, you can focus the gaze of your viewer by using more negative spaces. On my evil girl, I need to attract attention to her action; in this case the action is dripping poison into the King's glass of wine.

To check if everything is okay with your silhouette, create a new layer (Ctrl/Cmnd+Shift+N) and with the basic Round Brush (B) fill all of your character with one color. This new layer will reveal to you all the things that go wrong on your character by hiding the details and simplifying the character. ▶

01 Examples of refined concepts, two made traditionally and one digitally

02 Thumbnails on different layers help to clarify your ideas

03 Simplifying the silhouette can make an image richer, drawing attention to important areas
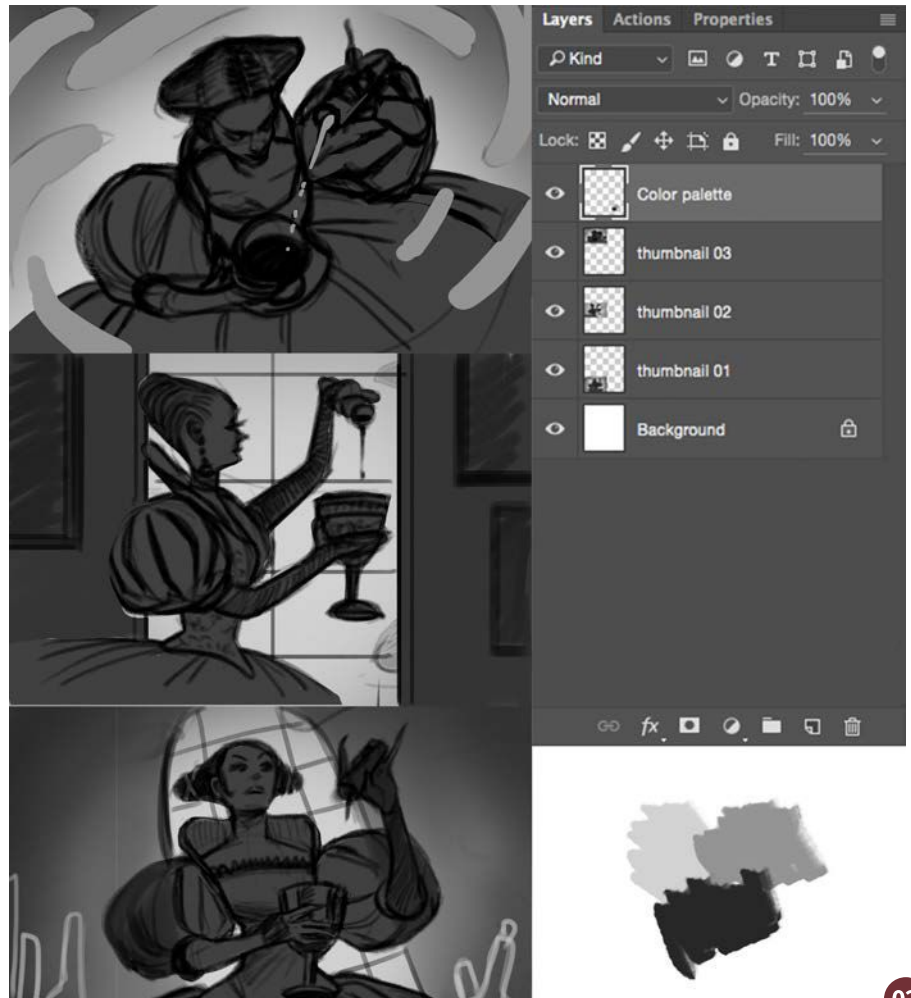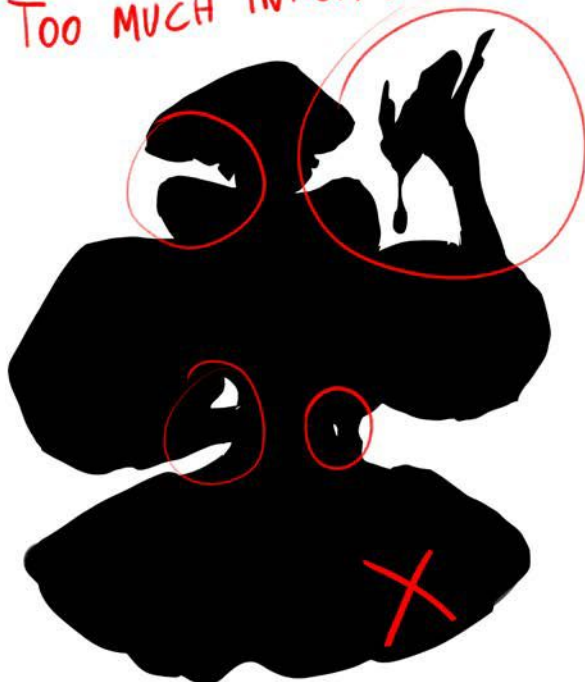
Don't be afraid to redraw something if you need to, remember that you're making all of these tough decisions now to avoid future headaches, and make your path to the final image way easier.

04 Play with values: I'm still using that basic round brush as I have no reason to use textured brushes right now; they'll just mess things up. Still using the same logic as with the thumbnails, I created a new layer for each part of my image, but I now include groups too. To create a group, use Ctrl/Cmnd+G or click on the folder icon at the bottom of the Layer panel. The values of an image will determine the areas with the most contrast, which will create a focal point.

Contrast areas are also useful for directing the viewer's eyes, but for now I need to find something that matches with the storytelling I want to create with this scene. So, if she were planning to poison the king, where would she be doing this? If she doesn't want to be caught, it is probably more realistic if she is hidden away somewhere, so I decide to place her in a darkened chamber with light directed towards the act of pouring poison into the glass.

05 Start to model: As I have done when I created the thumbnails, I create a new layer (Ctrl/Cmnd+Shift+N) to use as a palette color, using again the light gray, medium gray and dark gray.

⚡ PRO TIPS
Don't forget the art masters
I've never met an artist that reaches a successful career without studying the art masters, so why should it be different with us? You could begin with Andrew Loomis, who you will easily find articles about online and his books in online stores. Studying art masters online and in books is a fantastic way to learn and helped me a lot in the beginning of my career. Analyzing paintings from John Singer Sargent, Anders Zorn, Giovanni Boldini, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, Édouard Manet, and Claude Monet, paying attention to their color palettes, compositions and anatomy is one of the best exercises you can do. You could also study some line actions of the works from Norman Rockwell, and J.C. Leyendecker is also a good illustrator to study too.

Use reference images
The successful way to use reference photos isn't to reach the greatest similarity you can get to the image but, instead of that, it's about developing your own interpretation of it. If you do some quick research into some of the art masters, you'll see that they try to reach the most harmonic way to compose an art piece. Even if you have to go a bit far from your reference photo it is worth trying to achieve that harmony. If you can't find a good reference photo for your new artwork, take a picture yourself! Don't be shy about it, remember that no one will see it except for you.

Now with the same basic Round Brush (B), I'm going from the biggest to the smallest brush, changing the brush size by clicking on the Brush panel at the top left and sliding the arrow through the line. The objective of working in this way is to make everything closely knit. If you start to detail things right now it will, most of the time, take you longer than necessary to perfect the image, rather than speed up the process. To make quick adjusts I like to use the Liquify tool, as it's one of the best time saver tools in Photoshop.

Select your character layer, go to Filter > Liquify and be happy! You can use it to stretch and squash the parts of the character that you judge need to be changed.
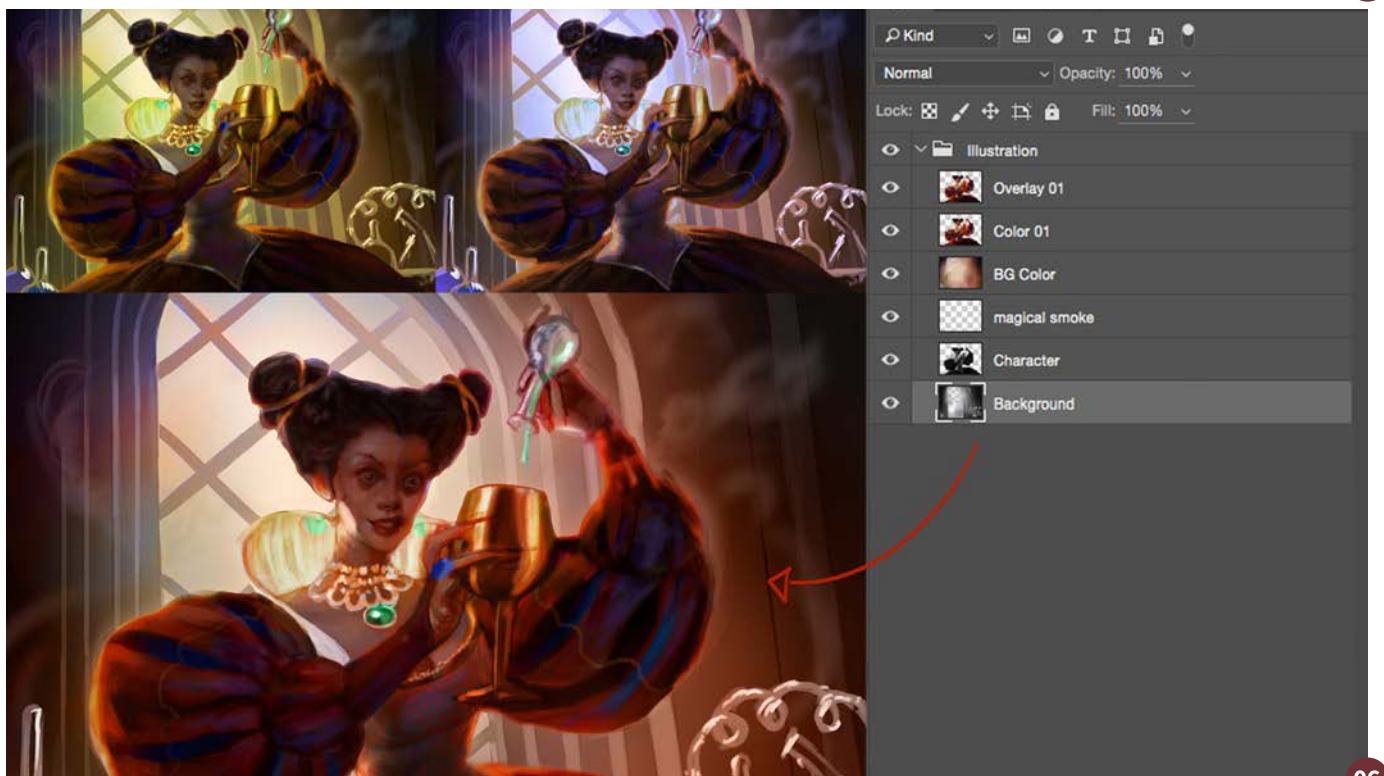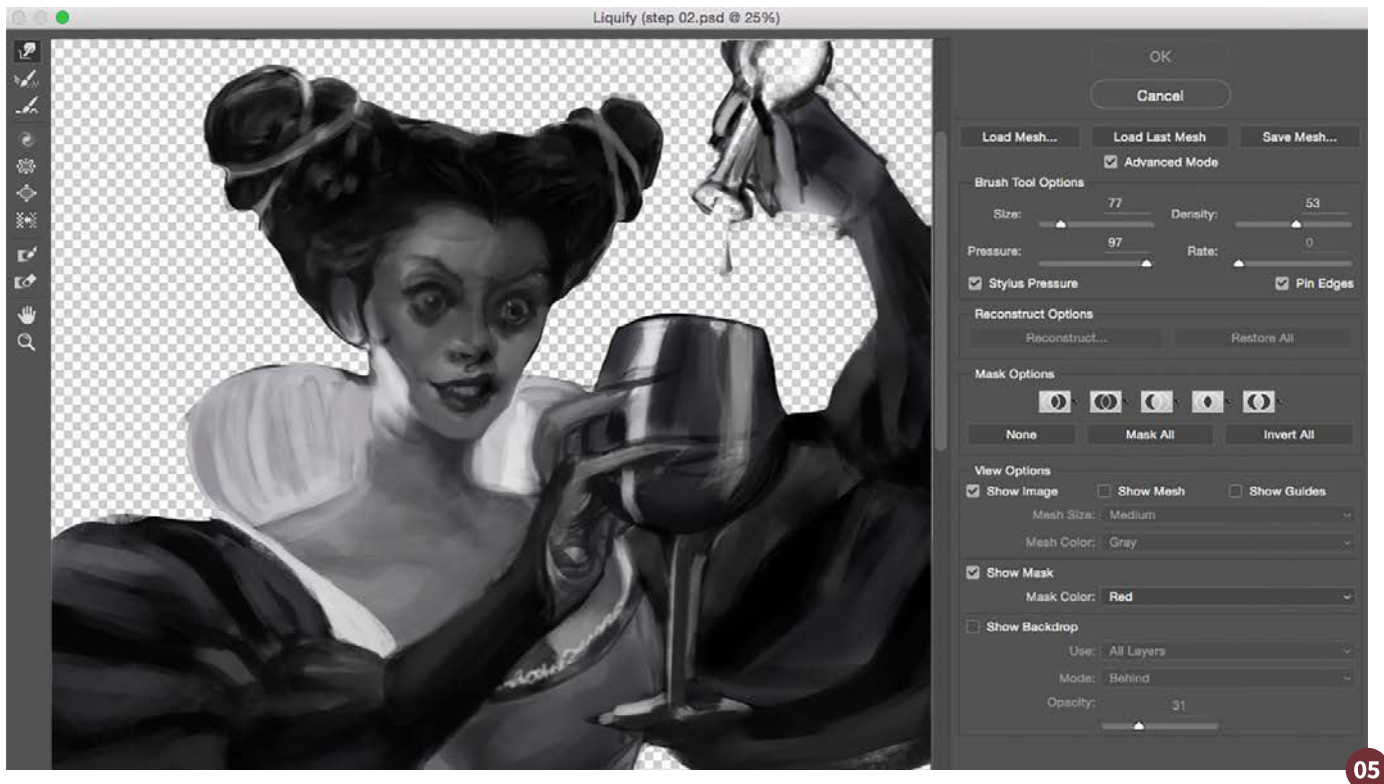
06 **So many colors:** It is finally time to start adding color to the illustration. I start creating a new layer (Ctrl/Cmnd+Shift+N) and change its property from Normal to Color, then with the same basic Round Brush (B) I start adding the colors. Next, I duplicate this Color layer using the shortcut Ctrl/Cmnd+J and change its property to Overlay with Opacity between 30% and 50%. This opacity feels like adding more "ink" but with a lower contrast.

Like I have done with the thumbnails, I can create a layer for each part of the image, one for the skin, another one for the clothes, another one for the background, or one for the whole character and another one for the whole background, and so on. Don't be afraid to try new combinations – the digital medium allows you to do that! When I'm happy with it, I merge all the layers of a group (Ctrl/Cmnd+E) and it becomes easier to start adding the details. ▶

04 Use black and white values to define areas with contrast

05 Make quick adjusts to the character with the Liquify tool

06 Try color palette variations to sample different atmospheres
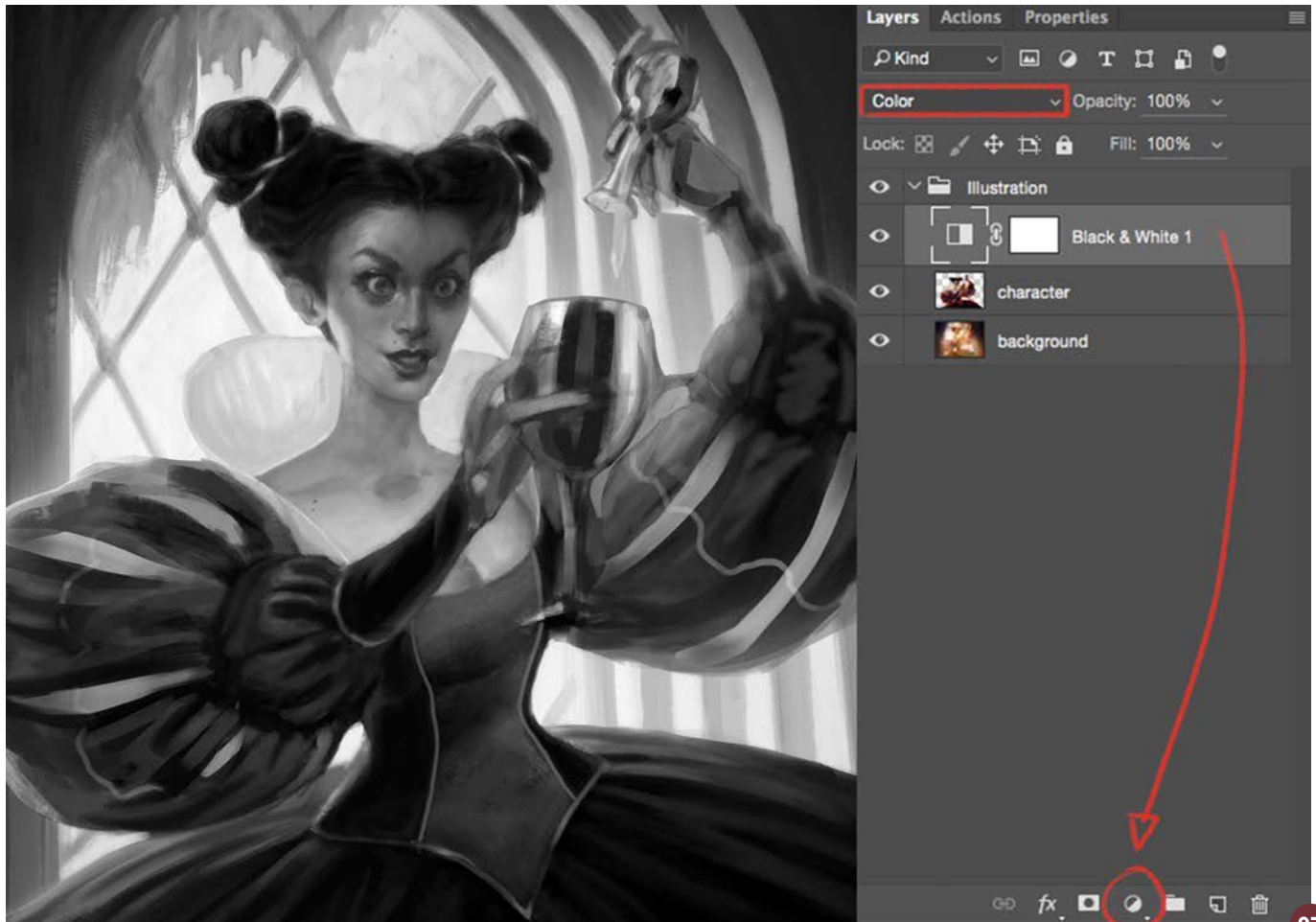
"I create a new layer (Ctrl/Cmnd+Shift+N) and make a quick redraw with the same basic round brush"

07 **Let's polish it!** With the main colors settled, it is now time to add effects like reflected lights, glitter, hair strands, freckles, fabric patterns and any extra detail you want. You can start to use texture brushes now, as they will make your painting much richer and more organic looking. To be sure that the values are still correct while you paint, go to the adjustment layers icon at the bottom of the Layers panel (the icon is a half-white/half-black circle) and click Create an adjustment layer > Black & White. Then change its property from Normal to Color and turn it on sometimes to check if everything is continuing as you expected.

Working from the biggest brush to a smaller brush is still a good choice here. For example, you could use a large brush for the hair, and as you're adding details gradually use smaller brushes to give the hair depth.

08 **Painting materials:** Painting different materials can be tricky the first time you do it because you are thinking about reproducing

every detail of it, but our brain only needs part of the information in order to understand what we want to show.

If you Google some photos of velvet, for example, you'll see that it works in the opposite way to the majority of fabrics, when it usually would have highlights it's actually dark and vice versa. I like to use a Texture brush (B) for this one because it helps me to give the sensation of mesh fabric. For

the golden glass, I create a sense of reflected light with lighter colors and other objects reflected in the surface. The more you add details like this, the more reflective the material will look. It's nice to add some white spots in it too, as this helps to keep the surface shining.

09 **New ideas:** It's very common to have new ideas in the process of creating an image; don't throw them away though, use
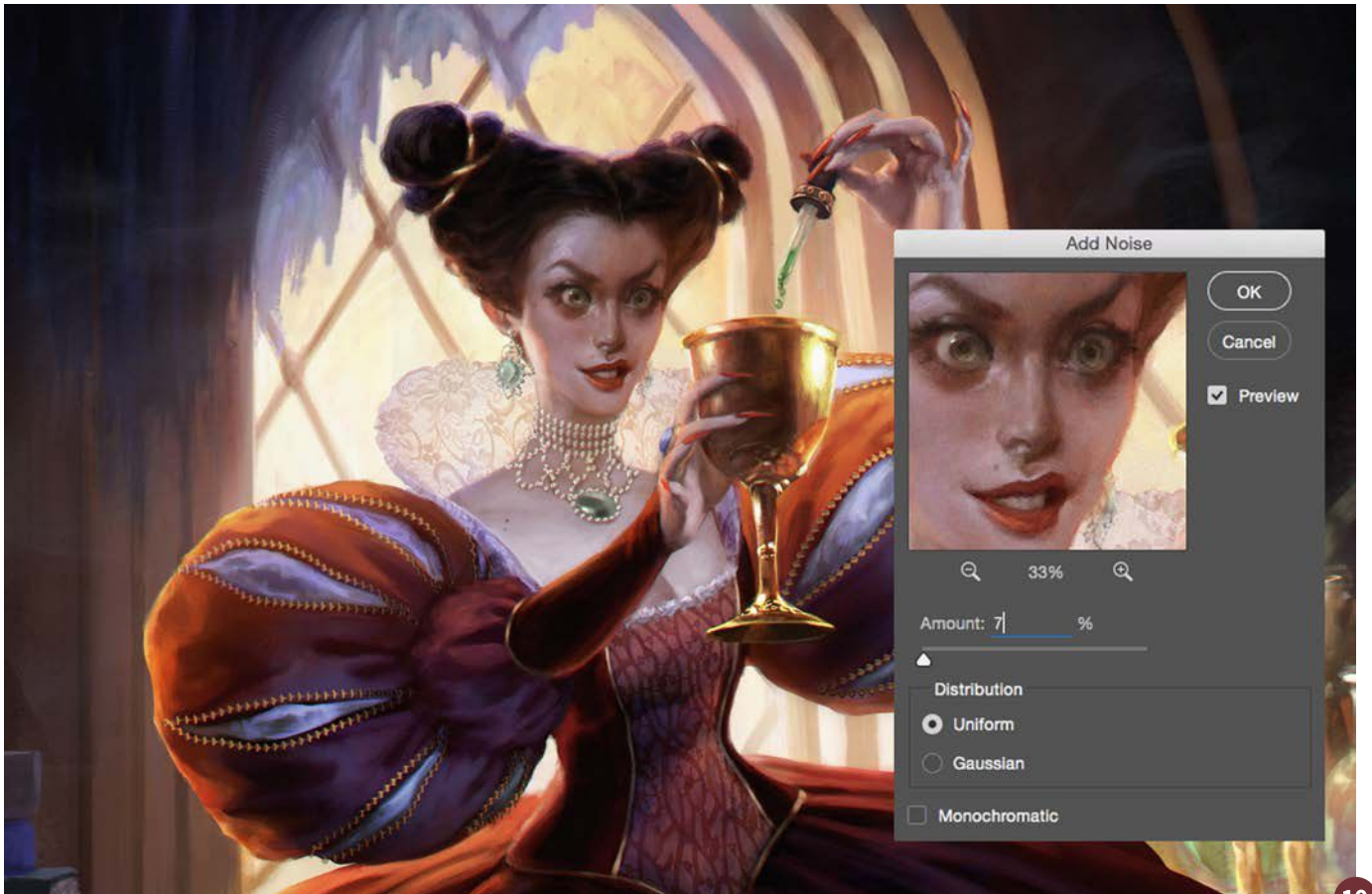
them! There is nothing wrong in testing out a better solution for a hairstyle or a foot, or any other aspect so long as it doesn't compromise your composition. Remember, you are working in a digital medium so you can test a bunch of solutions in a second. Don't be afraid of trying these new ideas, just create a new layer and test it out.

I realize that I don't like my character's hand at all; I think it would be great to pick a better pose for it. So I create a new layer (Ctrl/Cmnd+Shift+N) and make a quick redraw with the same basic round brush. Well, it works! Instead of a potion, a dropper looks way more appropriate for the scene, as my character only wants to add a few measured drops of poison into the wine rather than fill the rest of the wine glass.

10 **Finish with texture:** At the bottom of the Layer panel, I go to the adjustment layers icon and select the Color Balance. This allows me to make color corrections, like putting a bit of blue on the shadows, or a pinch of purple on the mid tones and some reds on the highlights. If you want to add more effect layers, you could try Curves. To do this go again to the adjustment layers icon, but now select Curves, and play with the graphic line a bit to see some color variations.

When you feeling happy with the colors in your scene, go to Filter > Noise > Add Noise, and set the Noise to about 7%, selecting the option Uniform. The noise helps to merge all the elements of the image together, giving the sensation of everything being in the same atmosphere. This is also an effect that is used in the movies during the post-production stage. Then, ta-da! Here you have your final image! ●

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07 **Check your values are correct using adjustment layers**

08 **Study images of different materials to gain accuracy**

09 **Don't be afraid to change the scene to test out new ideas**

10 **Noise helps unify the atmosphere of the image**
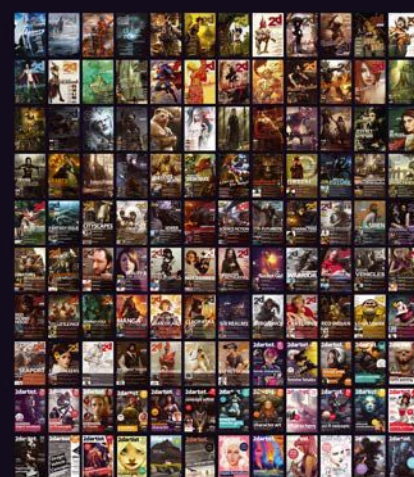
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Software Used:
Photoshop

Juan Novelletto is a
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for NGD studios and is also
art director at the indie
games studio Nastycloud.

Create sci-fi VFX

Juan Novelletto shows how color, light and special effects
can be used to enhance a sci-fi scene ▶

Polish your image with light features, realistic materials and ambient color...

Hello and welcome back! Today we are going to start the fourth tutorial of this series on the fundamental aspects of creating a sci-fi concept. If you remember the last tutorial, we worked on the sketch created during the perspective tutorial focusing on just the values, so the composition could be as good as possible, and we also added more details and new elements. In this new issue we are going to colorize this same concept and, after applying a base of color, we are going to work on the materials and different effects that will improve the image. The effects I shall cover are light rebounds, reflections, adding screens, new light sources and atmosphere to generate a dense feeling.

The main idea in this tutorial is that with a few tricks and tools from Photoshop, you can learn to improve your image using some very simple techniques. We'll also see how different materials work with light, and at the same time explore how these methods can be used to achieve more realism. Also adding new elements, such as multiple monitors, will give a chromatic variety (which was impossible to appreciate in the last tutorial) and so the image will be enriched with colors to avoid a boring monotony.

At the end of the tutorial, we'll stay with a color image and light effects to create a cinematic tone. I have distributed the steps to start with the color base, and then add in detail to each element, and in the end create a series of global effects to raise the image as a whole.

01 Base color: The first thing I am going to do is to return to the final image from the last tutorial. This image is only in grayscale, as we were learning about values, and examples of how the contrast will help generate spatiality, guide the eye into the composition, and so on. First, I apply a base color to this image so that I have a starting point for the color composition. However, the choice of color here should not be random and we must bear in mind what we want to transmit to the viewer. In this case I choose a cold color; since the contrast would be between cold and warm hues (we saw this in the first tutorial in this series, when we first tackled the composition). To apply this base color, use a Color Balance adjustment layer.

Next I add an adjustment layer with a Gradient Map, and in the blend mode use Hue, so as not to affect the values too much. Again at this point, the choice of color is everything we have learned so far about composition and choice of colors. Then I mask the relevant elements in the scene such as the closest character, boxes and the distant window to vary the general color.

02 Matching colors: I already have an image with a base that is going to allow me to easily give the image materials more detail and color, and important elements in a particular way. Before you do this, it is important to make sure the entire image is harmonious, so nothing is too separated from the rest. I add a Color Balance layer, and then again, a Gradient Map in the Color blend mode with low opacity, since this subtly dyes the entire image with two tones.

The next thing I do is paint with a very soft brush and the blend mode Lighten with a desaturated green tone. Lighten lets you blend areas without losing clarity, which means it clarifies what is darker and leaves intact what is lighter. This will give the image more depth and will drop the contrast in the central area of the image (remember in previous tutorials, I said the closer the things are, the higher the contrast is, and the further away, the lower the contrast). With a layer in Overlay we are going to tint the image using two complementary colors, warm and cold in a more aggressive way, so we use a Gradient layer.

03 Character: One of the central elements of the composition is the character that is closest to the camera, since it occupies a large part of the canvas and the viewer shares its point of view. More attention needs to be paid to rendering this character than the rest of the scene, because it helps to suggest how much further away the other character is. ▶
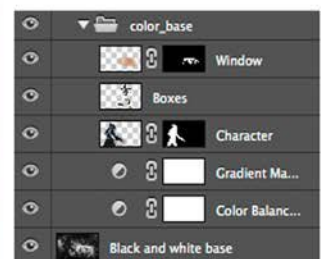
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01 Quickly colorize a base in grayscale to create a base color

02 Gradients with different blend modes help to balance the image

03 Metals enrich the image with more colors for reflecting light
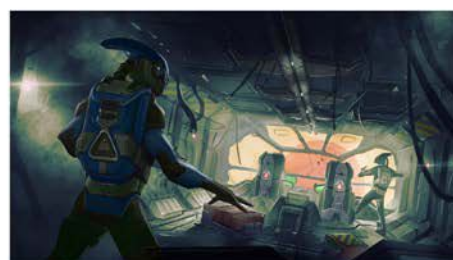

1) BLACK AND WHITE BASE

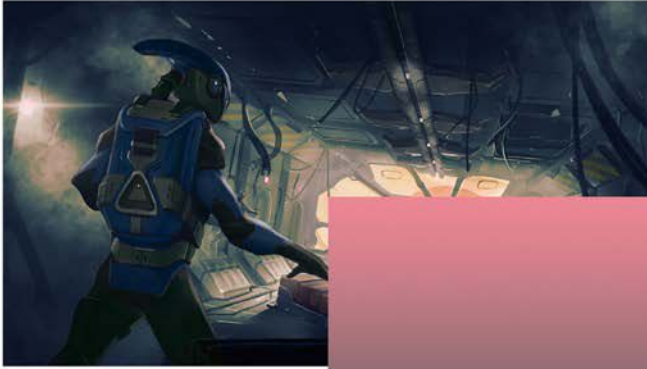2) WITH COLOR BALANCE

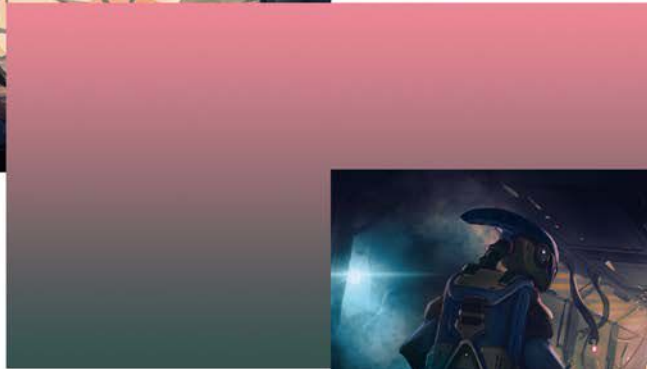KEEP YOUR LAYERS WITH NAMES AND ORGANIZED

3) ADD GRADIENT MAP
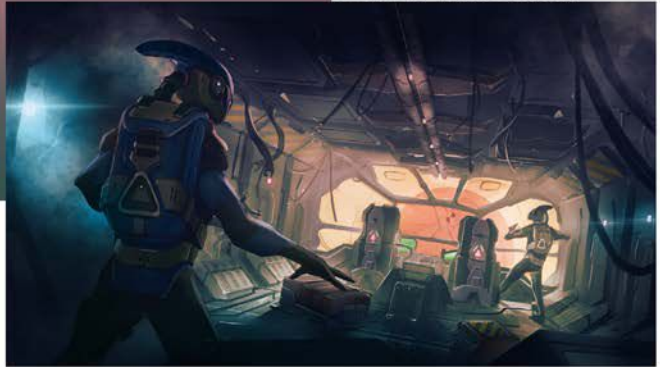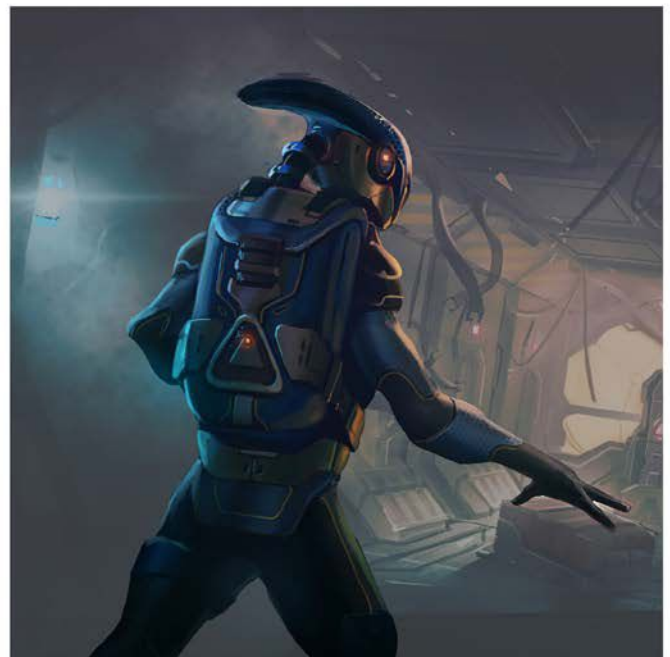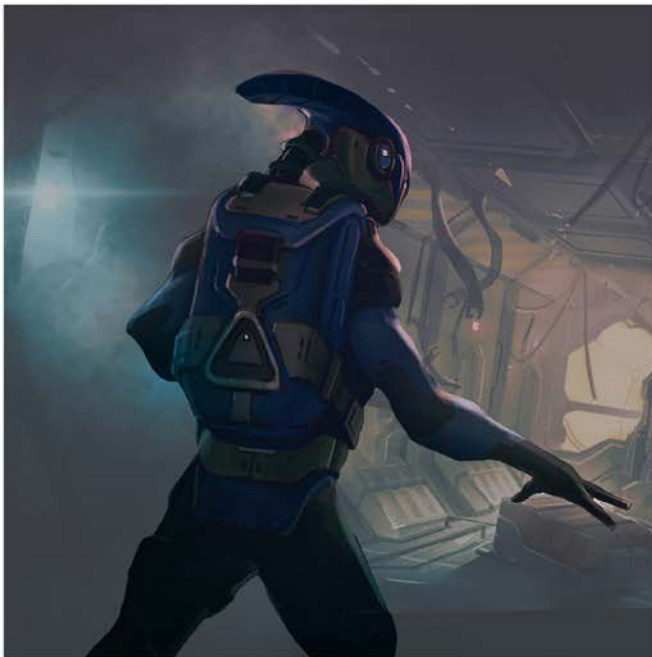

3) SOME ELEMENTS COLORED
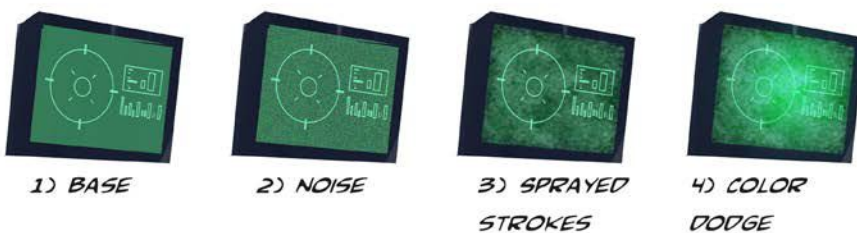
01

BASE

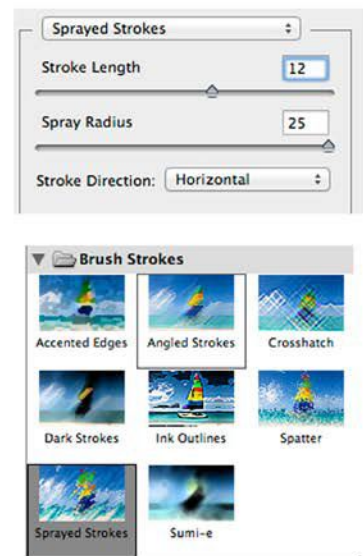GRADIENT

GRADIENT WITH OVERLAY

02

BASE

OVERLAY
BLACK AND WHITE

OVERLAY
WITH COLORS

03

SPRAYED STROKES FILTER

1) BASE   2) NOISE   3) SPRAYED STROKES   4) COLOR DODGE

Being closer, the colors do not mix as much and differ among each other.

I do a little pattern to the grid of the fabric (you can see how patterns are created with more detail in this same tutorial in the tool tip on custom patterns). After this grid, I separate the different materials of the costume. The first one I work on is metal, since it tends to be more reflective, and in our scene we have many sources of light, so this material will receive more light rebounds.

You can also exaggerate this to make it more interesting, and at the same time to serve as focal points. A quick way to work with metals is with layers in Overlay and two colors well contrasted in values.

04 **Add monitors:** Adding new light sources will continue to enrich our scene, especially when in a sci-fi image. In this case I'm going to add various displays, so that they are consistent with the ship. I can put flat colors on these displays and use them as light screens or monitors. Because I am working a concept, I don't need these displays to be in great detail, but I just need them to suggest what they are.

A quick way to work on these monitors is with masks, and painting with a textured brush. Paint then two types of monitors, one red with a warning symbol, and another green with a head-up display (HUD) of information from the ship. To

⚡ PRO TIP
Custom pattern

As we saw in the tutorial, you can generate a material with a texture. One way to create your own textures is to create your own patterns. The way to do this is very similar to creating a custom brush, only you have to be careful that your image has a good repetition, because otherwise the joins will be noticed. Once you have created the pattern, you just need to select the Paint Bucket tool and choose "Pattern" then paint your selection. Take into account that if the pattern comes from a big image, the only way to control the scale is with the layer style Pattern Overlay, and not with the Paint Bucket tool.
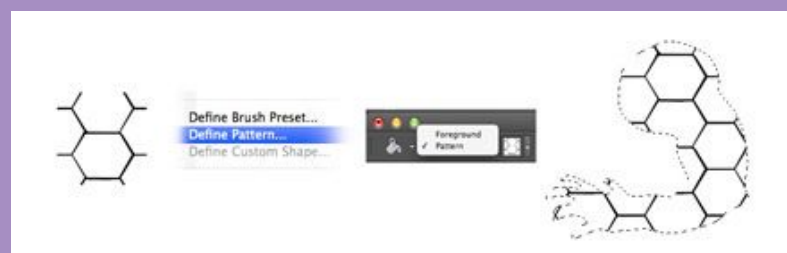
give a more realistic effect to this you can use a variety of Photoshop filters. In this case use the Noise filter, without the monochromatic option, and then a filter called Sprayed Strokes to give distortion to the image.

05 **Loose boxes:** I continue detailing items that are scattered through the interior of the ship. Two of these are boxes that are loose, and I want them to gain importance in the scene so I'm going to work with them a little bit more than the rest. Similar to the work on the

character, mask these and apply the various light details to the materials.

I also add a screen that can generate reflection on the floor of the ship. In general, if the floor is metallic, as in this case, it tends to be more reflective and rebounds light from all sides. A simple way to achieve this effect without doing too much rendering is to duplicate the layer containing the reflected object and paste it in a mirrored way. Once this is done, I lower the opacity and erase the edges a bit, so they blur.
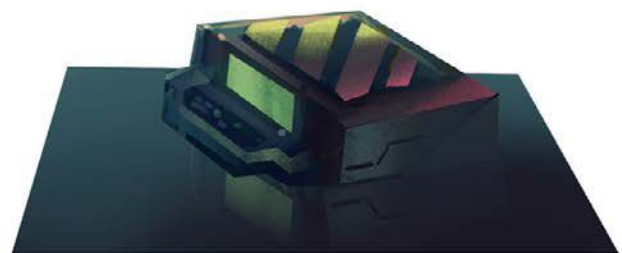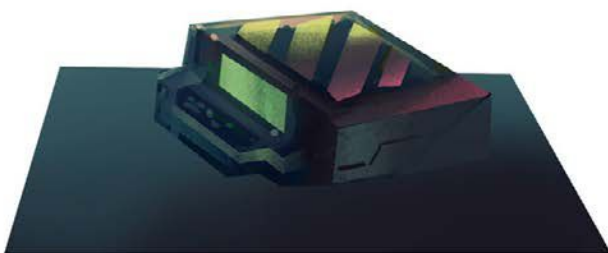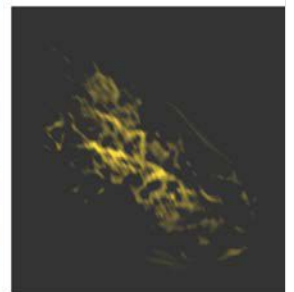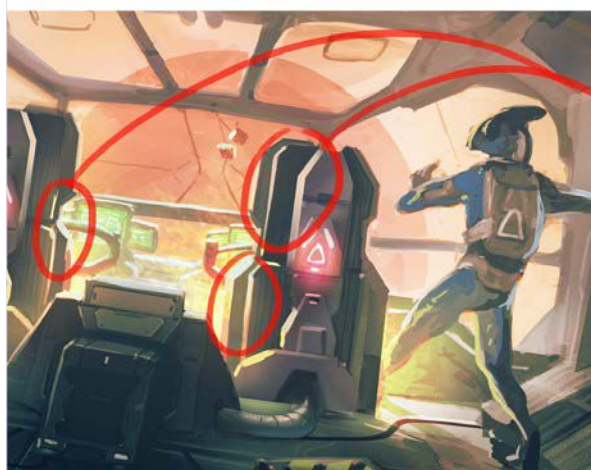
REFLECTION

06 **Armchairs:** One of the other important elements in this scene is the central part of the ship, since it is a focal point for the light. To reinforce this, I'm going to add fire; this also helps the storytelling because it tells the viewer that the characters are in danger, and that something has just happened. In addition, fire creates a good contrast of color for the dominant coldness.

I mask both armchairs and, with a textured brush and a layer with the blend mode Color Dodge, paint with a very bright color. I then apply a glow with a softer brush. The metal of the chairs will reflect the fire with more intensity, so I paint them with a very intense yellow. This type of bounce light bounce helps to suggest certain geometries without having to draw them fully: remember that the brain almost always tends to fill in the information the eye does not receive. ▶

TEXTURED BRUSH

MORE BRILLIANT

04 Photoshop filters can be very useful for generating realistic effects

05 To generate reflections on metal surfaces you can simply mirror the layer

06 Layers with Color Dodge serve to elevate dark zones with a lot of intensity

WITH INNER SHADOW

HUD WITH SIMPLE SHAPES
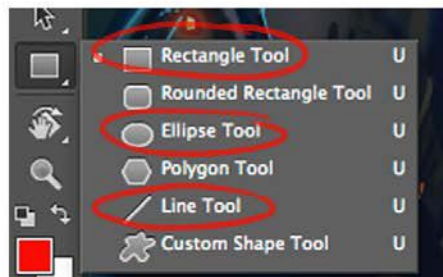
07 **Window and HUD:** The image is gaining details and colors, but I can still continue to add information. The main window, even though it is far away and does not require much detail, can be worked on subtly so it is a little richer. The first thing I do is add a few lines of color, and with the layer style Inner Shadow, I quickly give a sense of volume.

On the other hand, I also add another HUD to the glass; not as invasive as on the monitor, but this is an interesting detail if the viewer sees it. To make this type of HUD you can find many references on the internet since they are very common in everything related to sci-fi nowadays.

As this one is distant in the scene and doesn't need so much work, I will make one with simple forms, and once I have created it I adjust it with the Transform tool and slightly lower the opacity. I then mask the glass, and as we saw before, give the glass more reflection with Overlay, using two contrasting colors.

08 **Lights and general reflections:** Now I am going to very quickly detail several elements at the same time. The most important thing is to generate a variety of materials, so I am going to make some areas more reflective than others. For example, on the ceiling, I mask and paint with a lighter Soft brush, so that they stand out as metals. On the other hand, I add lights since they will also serve to reflect both on the floor and on the walls. In the ceiling I add several repeated lights, and I tone them with a cold color, then I do the same thing with the walls.

Remember that repetition generates patterns, and patterns create a rhythm in the picture in terms of design. With these new lights I need to add new light reflections, especially on the main character. Finally I add sparks with different particle effects, and so generate more realism and give life to the image.

09 **Atmosphere and reflections:** This time I am going to take care of the image in general instead of each element, since we are approaching the final composition. First of all, I will repeat the same thing we did with the boxes, only this time in a more general and subtle way. Copy the entire image, and paste it inverted at the height of the horizon, to generate the reflection on the floor. Put it in the Soft Light blend mode, which is not very intrusive, and lower the opacity. In this way you are able to break a bit of uniformity, and with artifacts, generate an interesting texture.

To generate the atmosphere, I will select a layer within Channels which have an interesting contrast, if you Ctrl+left-click the mouse, on that layer, it will generate a selection. Then create a new layer, and with this selection make one mask, painting the atmosphere in that layer.

10 **Final image:** We now almost have our final image. As last details, let's take it a bit further to give even more atmosphere. I add some reflections and blurs of light in the lamps, to
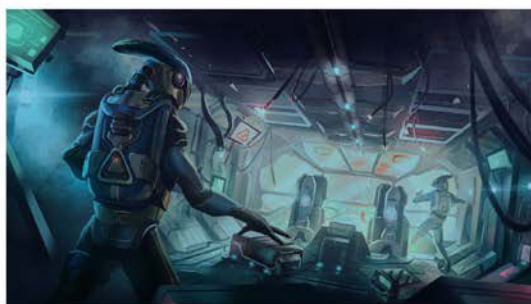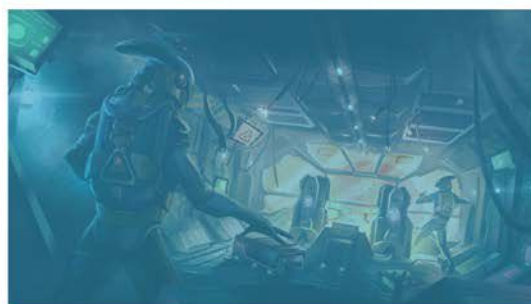
A LOT OF LIGHTS!

08

CTRL + LEFT CLICK

WITH MASK

WITHOUT MASK

09

break up any monotony. With the Lens Correction filter selected I generate a small distortion to give a very slight fish-eye effect – this helps to improve the composition.

I also add a bit of chrome aberration, which is quite common in sci-fi pictures. To do this, within Channels, select all in the red channel using Ctrl+A, and move a single pixel horizontally. You will notice a few small lines of colors at the edges.

Another good addition is to put very little noise to generate a grain similar to films. I recommend you do this very mildly if it is directly on the image to avoid losing information.

You can also do this in a new layer with a gray and the Overlay blend mode. In this way you will not alter the image. Finally, I add a few black bars above and below, to continue with the idea of making the concept as cinematic as possible. ●

07 Layer styles and basic shapes can help to improve an image

08 Images start to take on life when elements with distinct reflective materials are added

09 Masks are a useful tool to work fast, and if combined with Channels they become very powerful

The Artist

Juan Novelletto
novelletto.com.ar

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SIGN-UP TO THE 3DTOTAL **NEWSLETTER**

Create a sci-fi cloud-scooper

Use Photoshop and basic 3D models to create a
futuristic flying vehicle in this tutorial from Col Price ▶

The Artist

Col Price
coldesignltd.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Col Price is a freelance concept artist and art director based in Liverpool, UK. He has twenty years experience in the gaming industry and has worked for some of the biggest studios.

Learn how simple 3D can enhance your work process...

In this tutorial I will show you how to create a sci-fi image with a viewpoint taken high up in the air. My idea for this image is that in a sci-fi world, there are these cloud-scooper ships that fly around at a high altitude and suck in clouds. Those clouds are then stored inside the ships in balloon style backs so that they can be used to re-seed the rest of the planet to help terra-form it.

Although the majority of this will be done in Photoshop, I also want to show just how quick and easy it is to get a 3D mesh up and running. Using some basic 3D models in your work can help you create a complete image in double the speed.

01 Thumbnail sketch: I first make a quick thumbnail sketch, which I will use just as a mental note to myself more than anything. I can use this as a guide and then see where it takes me during the painting process.

However, one thing I have learned after twenty years in the games industry is that not everyone is an artist. Sometimes people need to be shown ideas in a finished or close to an "obvious" standard. By this I mean an image that won't
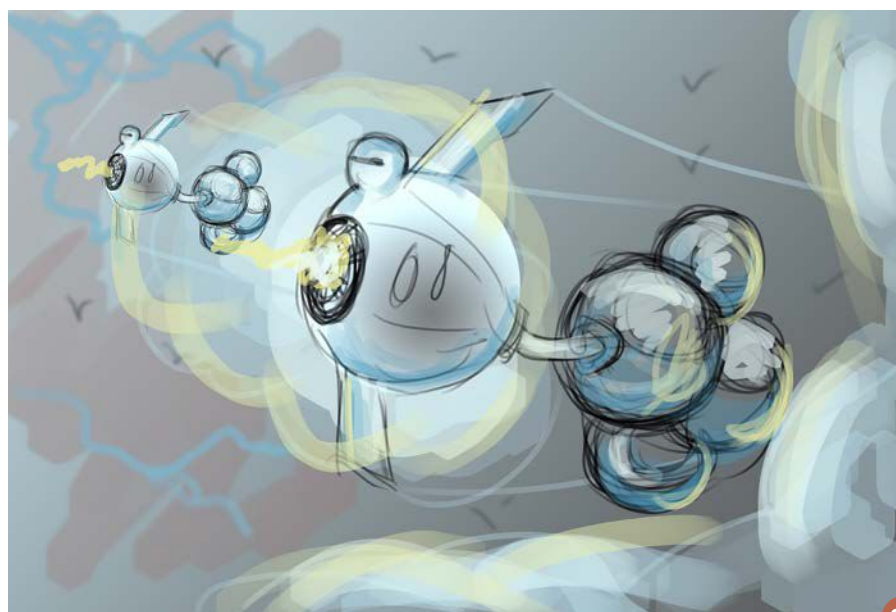
need to be explained as not all executives or studio heads can understand sketches, speed paints, or just an explanation. So the higher degree of finish you can get in a work, the better! Getting your ideas over clearly so everybody is on the same page is vital to achieving a brilliant finished work, and getting it finished fast is an even greater asset.

02 The 3D elements: So let's take the scooper itself. Again, using 3D allows

me to rapidly turn my idea around and offers maximum flexibility. I guarantee that if you get into the games industry you'll be using 3D models and sets given to you from the art team. Over-painting on these grayscale models will soon become the norm!

Take a look at figure 02 where I've placed a few letters on the image to briefly describe the elements of the cloud-scooper. This will show you how easy it is to get a rough model worked
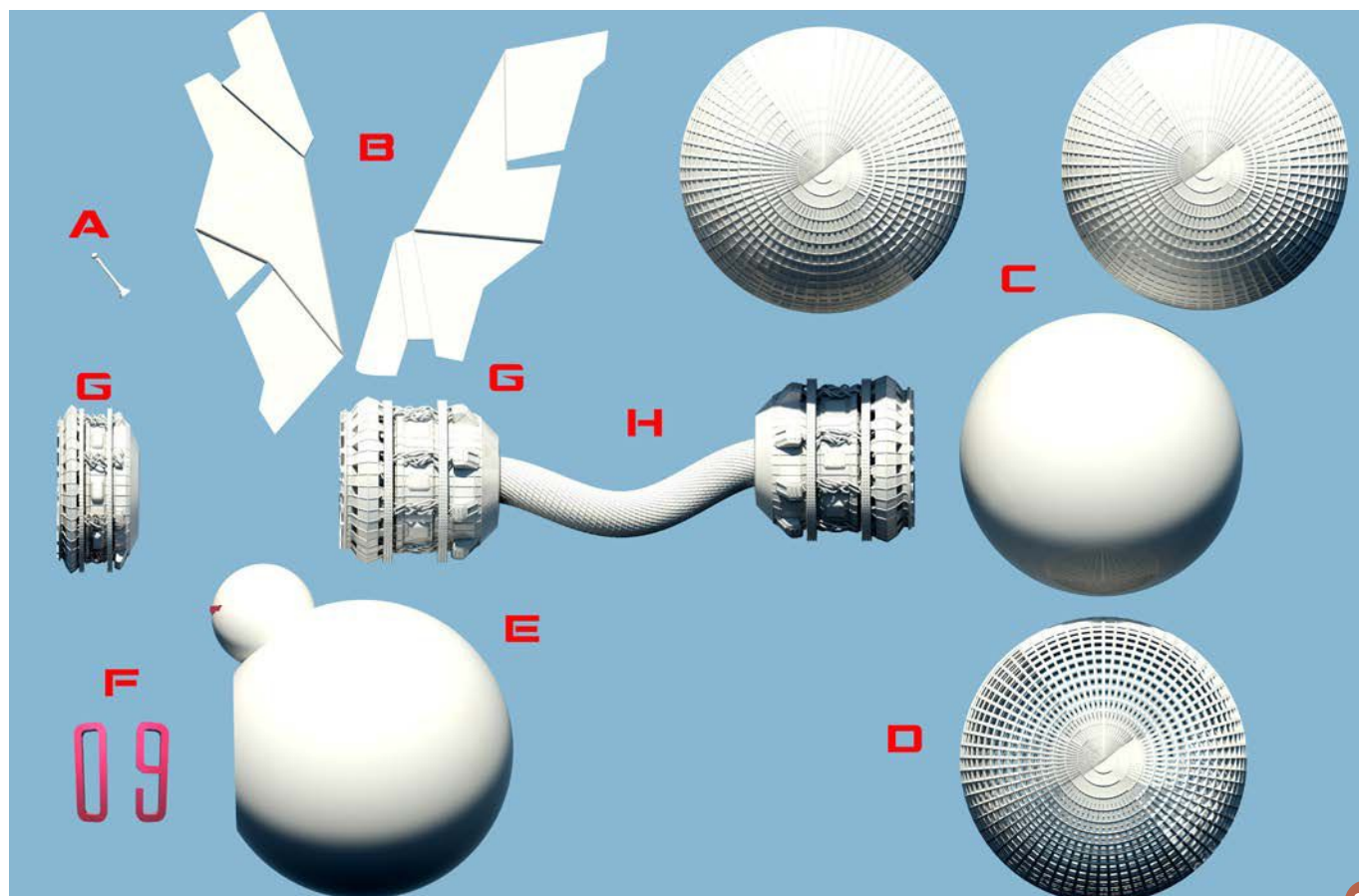
up. I am using 3ds Max, which you can easily get hold of with the education license from the Autodesk site (www.autodesk.co.uk). These guys also produce Maya which again you can obtain a personal learning license for if you prefer. All the objects I have created for the scooper can be recreated during your first steps into 3D! So looking at the image:

A: The antenna is a profile line drawing that has been turned into a 3D object with the Lathe Modifier

B: 2D drawn outlines, which have been extruded, and then a few faces extruded again for depth

C and D: Spheres which are duplicated and then the Lattice mode is placed to make a cage detail;

E: Two different sized spheres stuck together, and then using a cube as a Boolean object the left side is cut away

F: Text extruded and then bent to fit onto the sphere

G: A Lathe profile with faces extruded and duplicates of "H" added. The whole object is duplicated again and Lattice caged

H: A basic tube which is bent, and then scaled and duplicated to fit onto "G"

That's it! All these are made using the basic 3D functions and a basic supplied ceramic white material rendered in mental ray that's built into 3ds Max. It uses an internal sun/daylight system so you don't even have to worry about lighting effects on your objects. The ship is built so now it's time to paint up the rest.

03 **Brushes and river shapes:** I use a set of four brushes during this tutorial as I tend not to use a lot of different ones; I prefer to just change the attributes of the brushes for ▶

---

01   Rough out a thumbnail sketch as a mental note for the rest of the process

02   A breakdown of the basic 3D objects used for the cloud-scooper ship

03a The set of brushes used during this tutorial

03b The impression of rivers on the ground is created with the Magic Wand tool

Cloud Brush

Large Cloud Brush

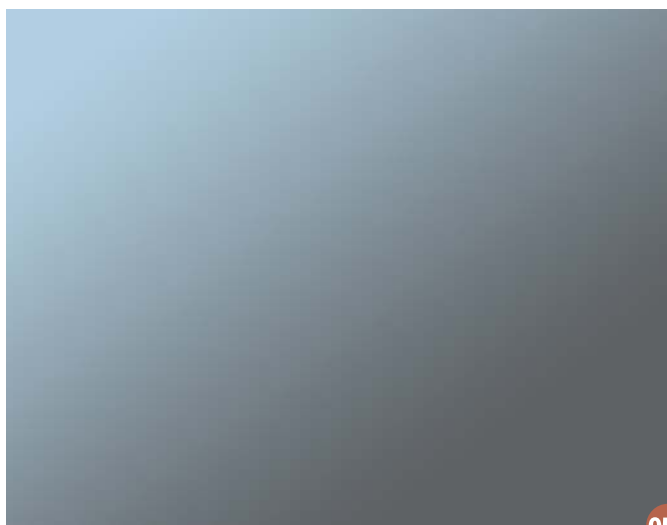Rock Brush

Standard Hexagon Brush

03a

03b

04a

04b

05a

05b

06

different effects. I want to create a feeling that the viewer is high in the sky looking down, so there is almost that satellite viewpoint feeling.

I create the surface way below the clouds by using the Magic Wand tool and drawing out a few river shapes. If you look at shots of rivers from space you can see them almost like trees and branches. From this height they become just abstract shapes. I've just filled these shapes with a basic block color.

04 **Texture the ground:** Keeping the river shapes on a transparent background, I also use Bevel and Emboss in the Layer Style drop-down list to give it some simple shading on the edges.

I can then duplicate sections of this and place them around the canvas. I add a rock base to the river shapes made by painting with a rock texture brush. I've kept the colors down to a minimum on this as it helps to keep the pattern more subtle. I run it through the Poster Edges filter, just enough to get some extra shading on the image. I duplicate this on a few layers, repeating the same process, and I also find using the Unsharpen tool can create some nice, fine but noisy outlines that
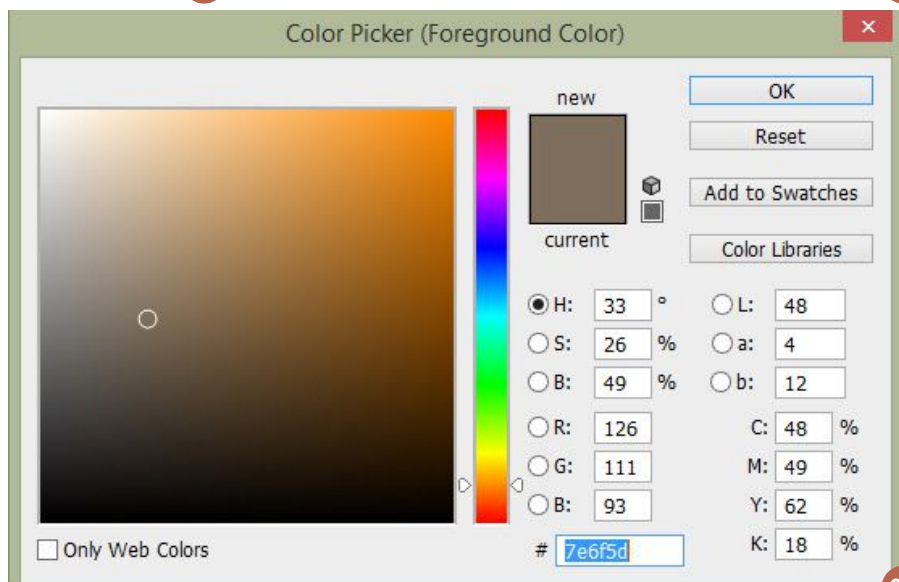
help to bring the rock texture brushes to life. It's a really quick process, and I'm not too bothered about detail for this as it only needs to have shape and form. I may well use Gaussian Blur to achieve a depth of field but for now I will save a back-up sharp image just in case!

05 **Sky and clouds:** Next up is the sky and clouds. I use a gradient fill, set at a slight

angle from right to left, which I will use to help with the depth of the image. Add in the ground plane and then with a standard airbrush eraser begin to remove the right hand side.

I've also gone with Gaussian Blur again on the ground plane as its gives a better impression of the distance between the ground and the viewer. You can choose to keep this sharp if you want

though. You can see from figure 05b that it's not necessary to take it fully back to the gradient. You just want the color to subtly come through so that you can build up the color and clouds in layers.

06 **Storm colors:** Using a large soft airbrush, I dab on a few blobs in a brownish-gray color so that the image starts to get that storm feel to it. Add over this with a single large cloud brush in a softer gray color. You can take this color by sampling in Color Picker from the brown you have just used, and this way you can keep within the hue of the overall image.

07 **Cloud volume:** Duplicate the layer and then raise the levels of the white just a touch. Using the Levels setting rather than Hue/Saturation gives you a finer control over everything. Get a soft eraser and begin to take away the top layer so that the darker layer of cloud is revealed. Using the soft eraser you can also create a more volumetric cloud shape.

08 **Side clouds:** Now add in some side clouds, but not fully white ones! They should be just bright enough to distinguish from the main cloud. Duplicate this then darken the clouds using the Levels sliders. Drag this layer so that it sits on the inside of the side clouds. ▶

07

04a Add shading with the Bevel and Emboss option

04b Paint the ground using a rock texture brush and the Poster Edges filter

05a The gradient fill added to create more depth in the image

05b Using a standard airbrush eraser to remove some of the gradient

06 Choose colors with Color Picker, maintaining the overall hue of the image

07 Levels and a soft eraser are used to give the cloud shape and volume

08 Create side clouds then duplicate and darken them

08

> ## "Having a library of VFX which you can drop into images is vital. Even if it is a batch of basic effects"

09 **Add in cloud-scoopers:** Drop in the cloud-scooper ship layer using the Alpha channel. I'm going to cut out the ships so I can put them on separate layers incase I need to move them around! On the smaller ship just erase the back so that it looks like it is emerging from the clouds. I also duplicate and scale a third ship for a distance cue.

10 **Smoke trails:** I just add a smaller white cloud to the bottom left of the image, sitting on top of the other layer to create more depth. Then I place a rocket trail I have created previously in on a Screen blending mode, and use the Warp tool to move the trails around creating that swooping feeling to them.

For the larger ship, set your opacity to 50% and with a medium sided cloud brush, paint over the tops on a separate layer. This will get you a dusty outer cloud section which will help to complement the core white air trail.

09a

Having a library of VFX which you can drop into images is vital. Even if it is a batch of basic effects, like smoke, fire, lights and so on, you can use, reuse and edit them. You'll find that your productivity will increase tenfold!

11 **Engine glows:** I bring in a jet flare image from my library of VFX and place it over the front of the ships. Scale and warp this to your

preference. Duplicate the flare, scale and distort, and place on the wing tips of the ships to look like the glow of engines, keeping it on Screen blend while you do this. Duplicate it a few more times and, using the Warp tool, create light highlights around the ships body.

12 **Cloud vacuum and color:** Just as a quick layer addition for the second ship,

09b
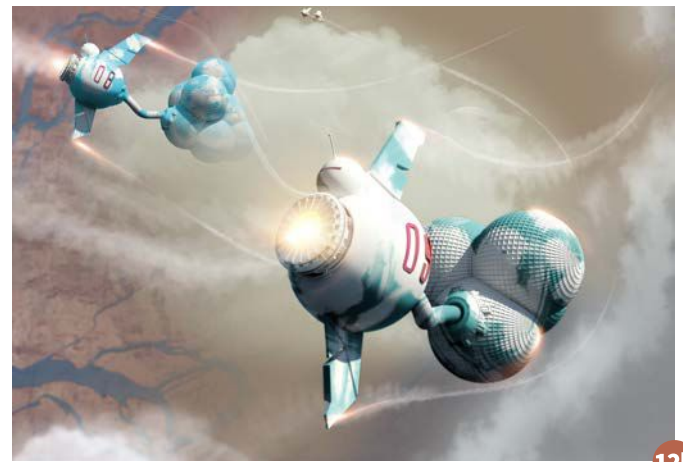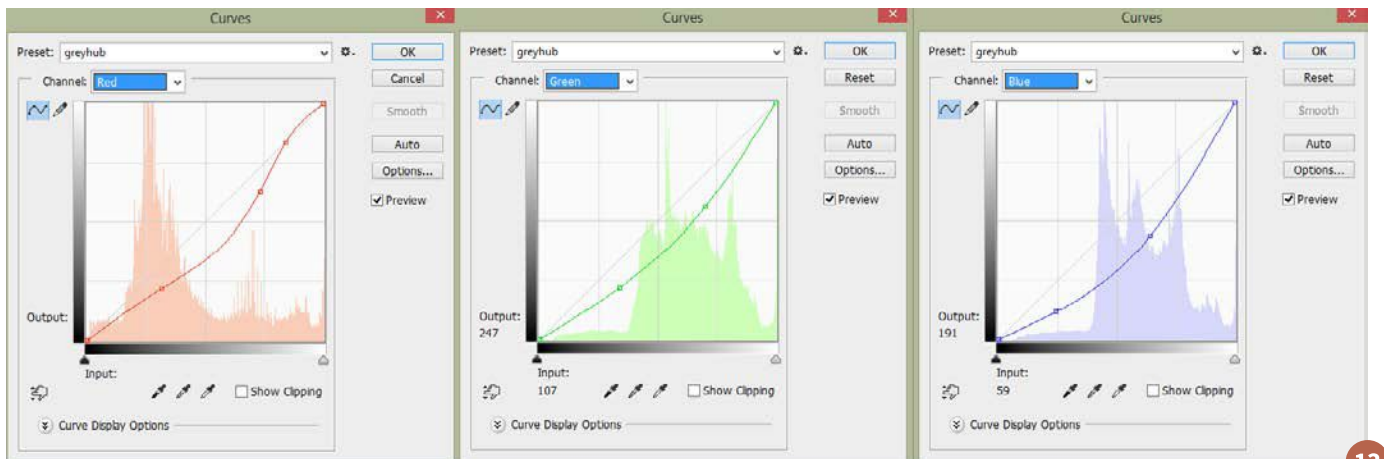
add in a plume of cloud as if it is sucking the cloud in. For the ship nearest to the viewer, I've duplicated the vapor trail and warped this so that it is curving towards the engine on the ship which is acting as a cloud vacuum.

As I reach the final stages of the image I just add in a bit of color to the ships, duplicate again, Colorize and then remove with an eraser, using a slight Gaussian Blur throughout.

13 **Curves and final touches:** In the final stage, flatten the image making sure you have saved it of course! Duplicate it and go to

Curves and set the red, green and blue channels to values similar to those in figure 13a.

I also add the same setting twice to this image and then drop the saturation down a touch, so that the browns stay and the pinks are also brought out in the clouds. This gives the final image that stormy feel. ●

09a The cloud-scooper ship base layer

09b Add the ship layer into Photoshop and blend with the image base

10 Add smoke trails to the ship using Screen and the Warp tool

11 Manipulate a flare to create lights from engines

12a Add a plume of cloud being sucked into the scooper

12b Add color to the ships using Colorize and Gaussian Blur

13 The Curve values Col used

The Artist

Luigi Memola
epta-design.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Luigi Memola is an Italian-born vehicle designer and digital artist. He is the Head of Design and founder of EPTA Design based in London, UK. He also works as a teacher at IAAD in Torino, Italy.

Render 3D models in Photoshop

Discover how Luigi Memola renders his 3D model to create a realistic sci-fi action scene ▶

Learn tips for rendering 3D models in Photoshop during post-production...

Each of my AEG27 advanced designs go through the same steps that are part of my workflow. Usually everything starts with a search for sketches, which I then turn into a model using 3D software and some rendering. With those stages done I move on to the post-production of the 3D render with a refined photo-editing job.

This article focuses on that last phase of the work – the post-production. It is very important to know beforehand what kind of results you want to achieve in terms of emotion and storytelling. The image is

> "During the 3D phase you need to prefigure that every detail is an important element of the final images"

enhanced, corrected, and reworked to achieve realism in the details, and development of the composition. The skills I use are a mixture of photobashing – to mix real images with my 3D – and photography, to balance the composition and position of some elements that guide the observer to interesting points. Storytelling and filter elements add an extra ability to express greater consistency (heat, dirt, movement, and so on).

01 **Details and research:** During the 3D phase you need to understand that every

detail is an important element of the final image. If the goal of your work is to give the impression of realism, then you need to see how robots work in the real world – look at the amount of details that goes in to their construction. Model as much as you can and it is worth investing some time doing research here.
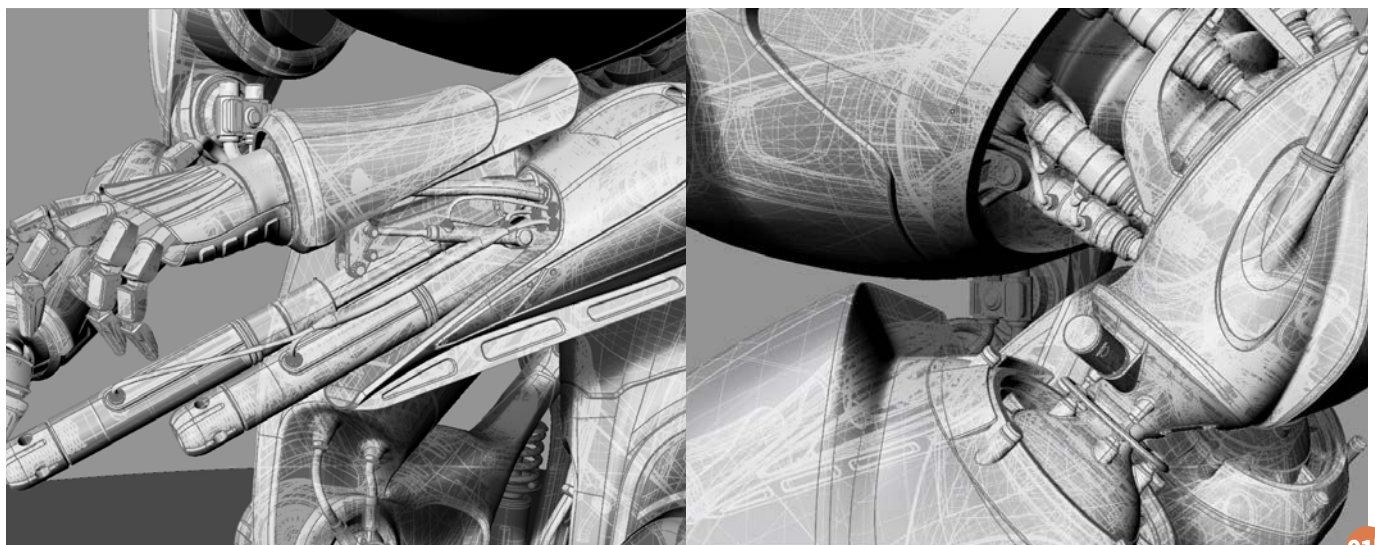
02 **Life and movement:** I wanted to show a scene in which the robot is in the middle ▶

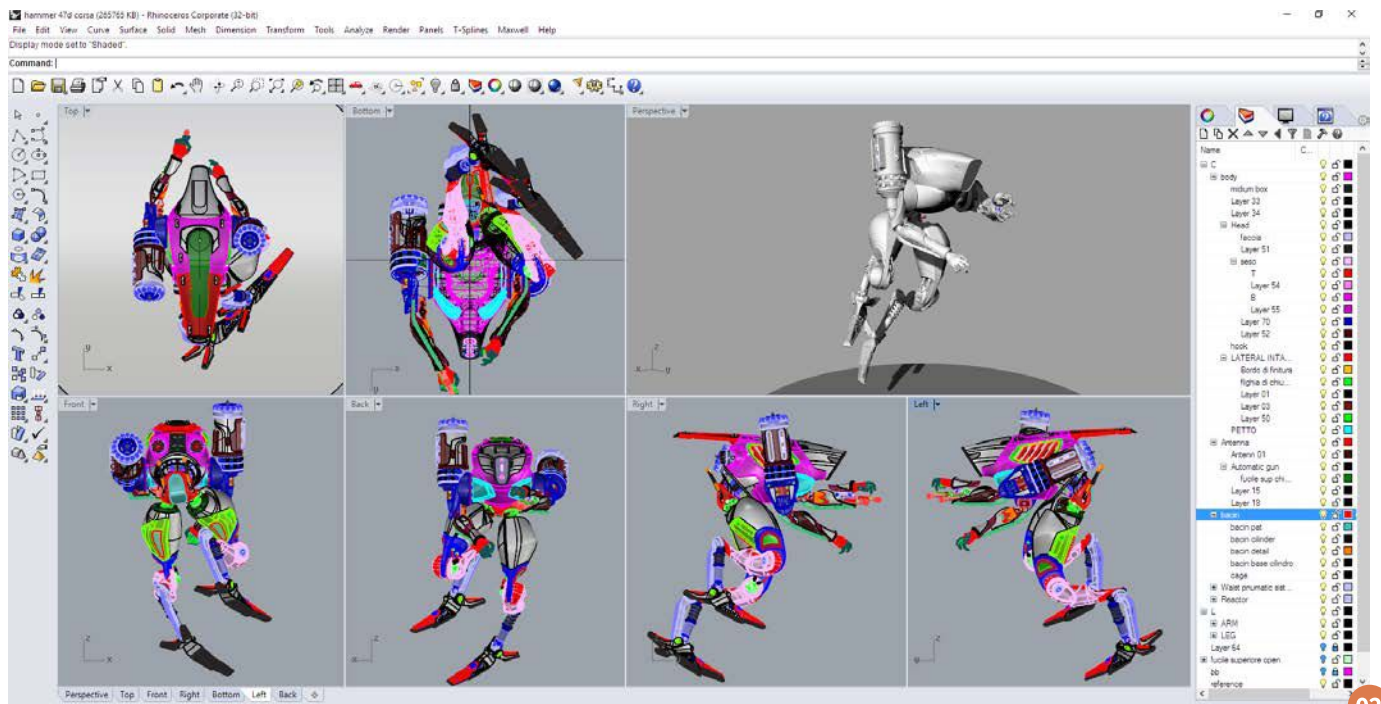**01a** Inside Rhinoceros, you can invest time to add details and separate all the components ready for rendering

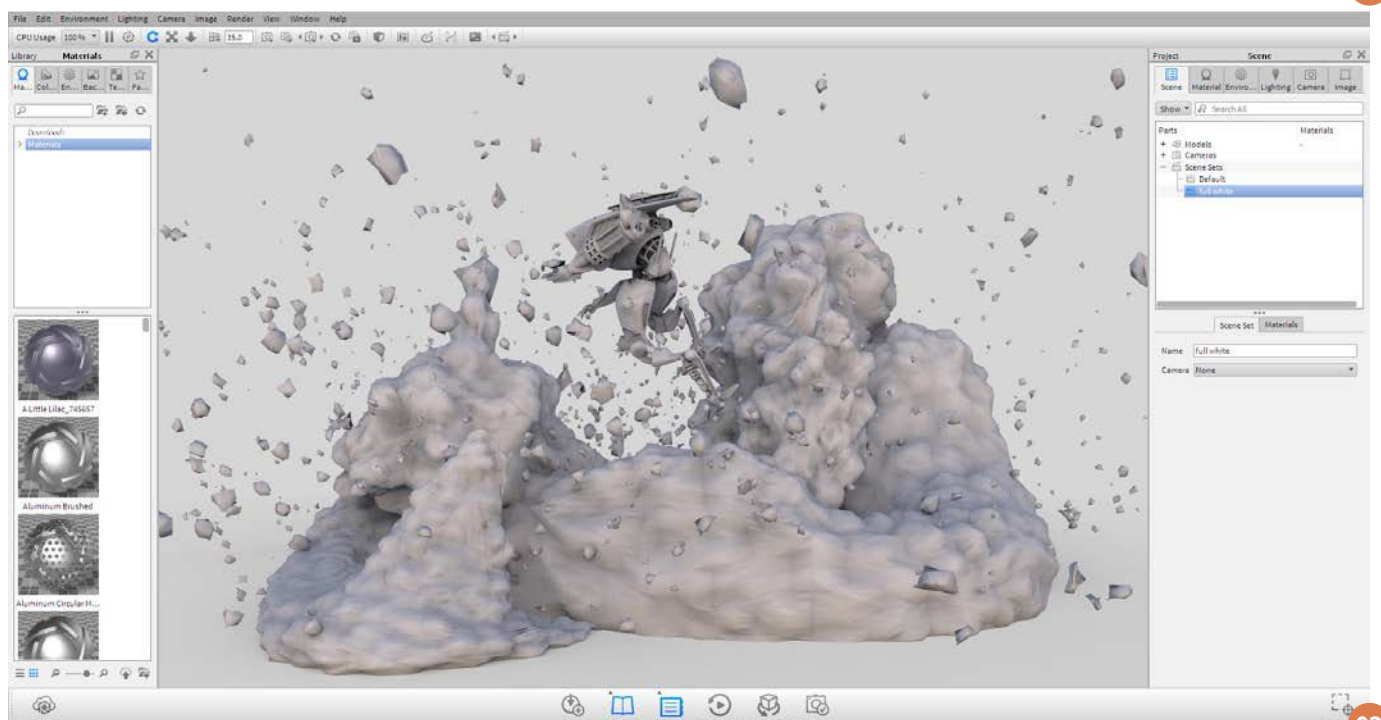**01b** Details of the moveable parts of the model

01a

01b
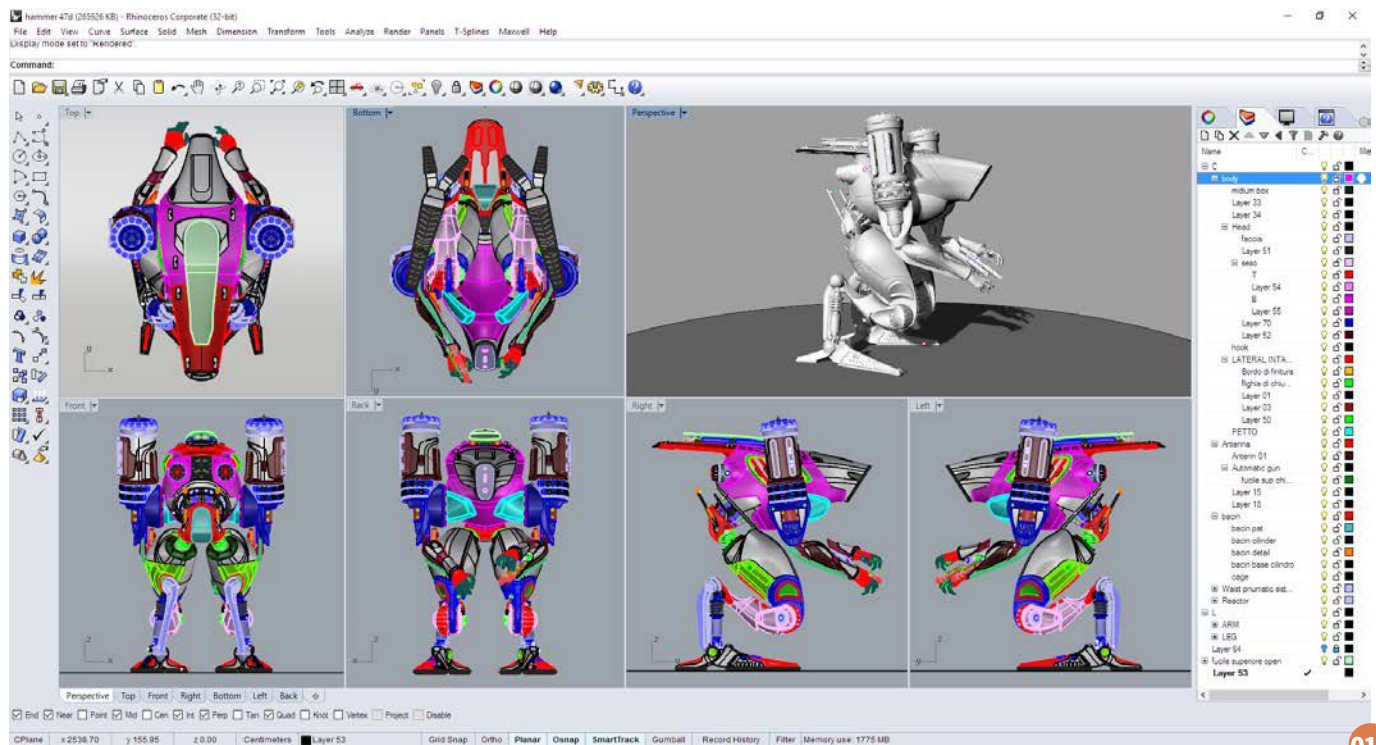
of the action, in the desert and in the midst of several explosions; maybe on another planet. I knew that I wanted the robot to be able to make spectacular jumps, so the leg design is very detailed. Rhinoceros makes it very easy to move and rotate the different components to give a more natural and dynamic pose.

03 **Blender and KeyShot:** To give the impression that the robot is in the middle of many explosions I decided to model (in Blender) some clouds to represent the smoke and stones of the explosions. In KeyShot it is easy to assign a suitable material for the explosion.

04 **Clown pass and rendering:** One of the KeyShot settings allows you to create a final render and a Clown pass (an automatically generated image which fills materials with a flat solid color). The solid colors make it very easy to select the various different materials, identify the different components, and above all, allow Photoshop to select and manually isolate the different components.

05 **Main folder and secondary folder:** I organized my Photoshop file by splitting everything into two folders based on their importance – the main folder and secondary ▶

02 In Rhinoceros it is easy to use the reference axis of the cylinder as a rotation axis to rotate the leg or forearm groups
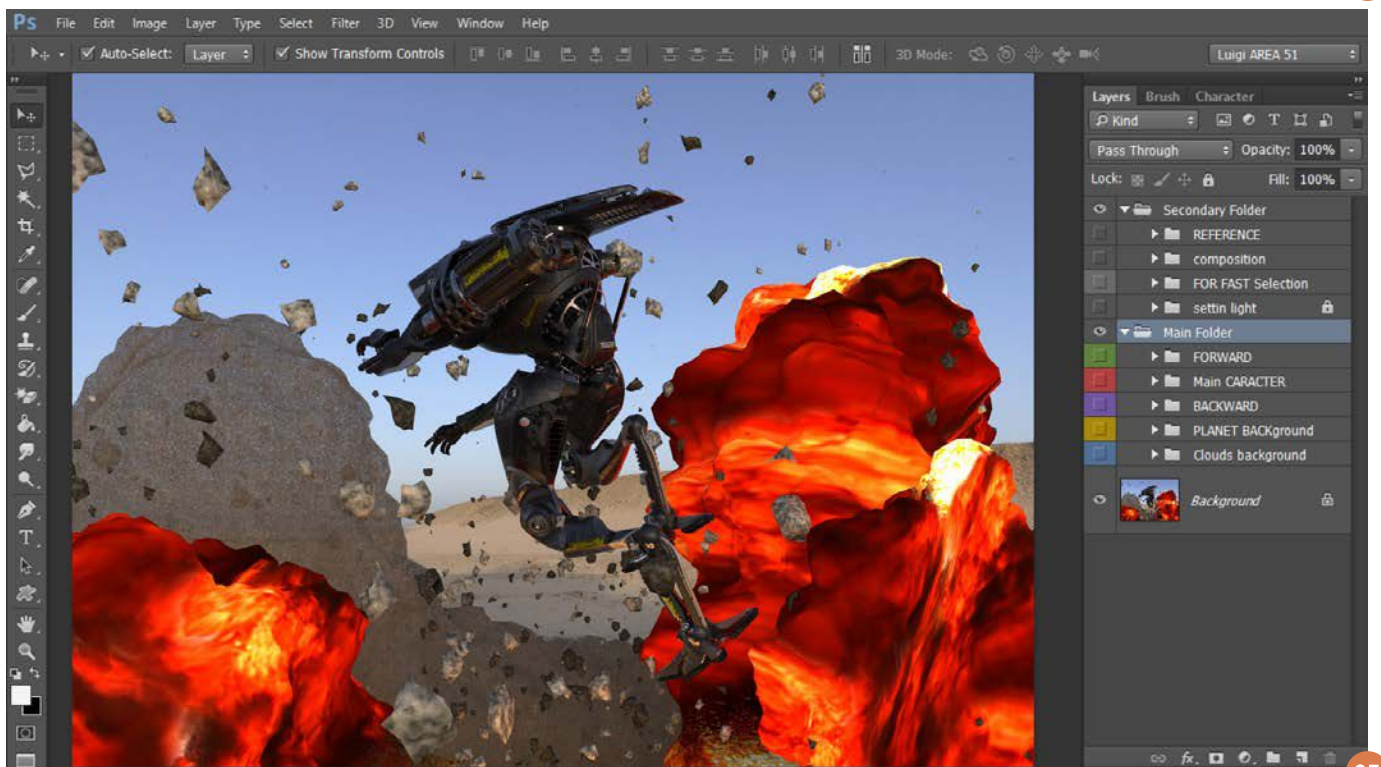
03 The model of the robot, with some extra models of smoke and debris

04 The output generated by KeyShot: the clown image on the left and 3D final rendering on the right
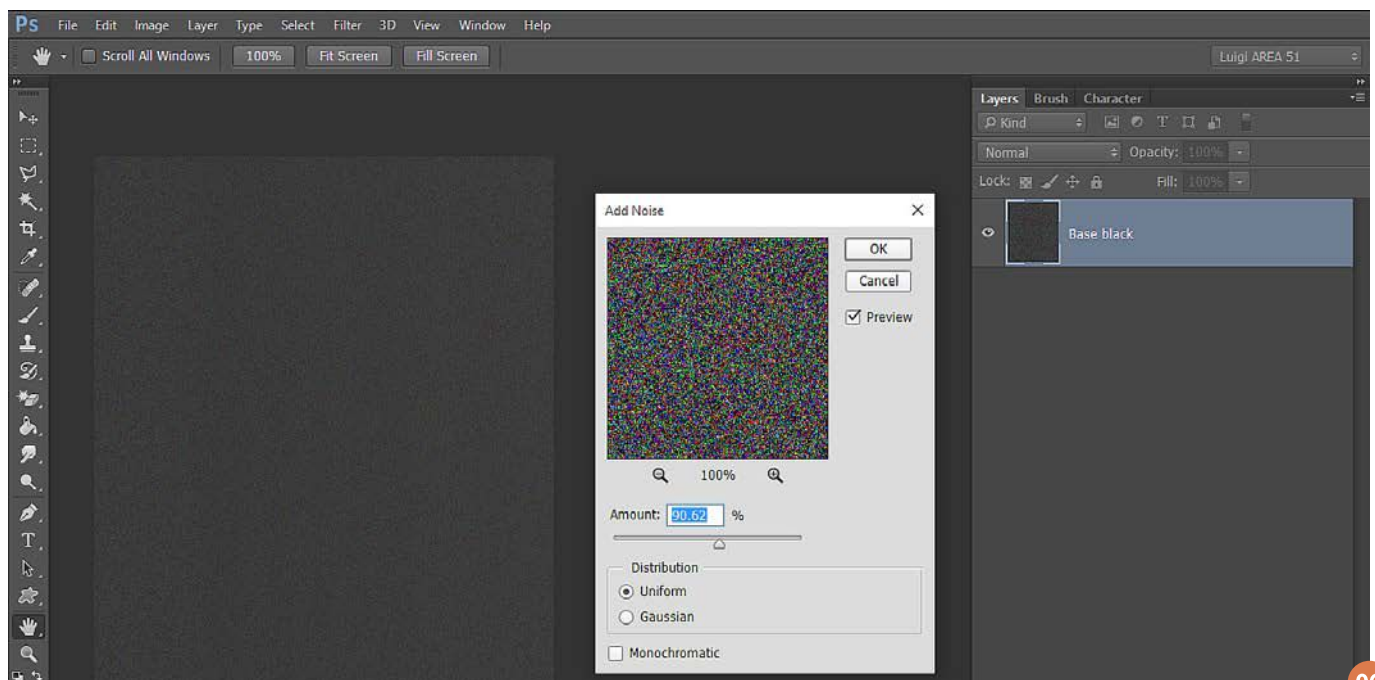
**05** The organization of folders is important when working with many levels
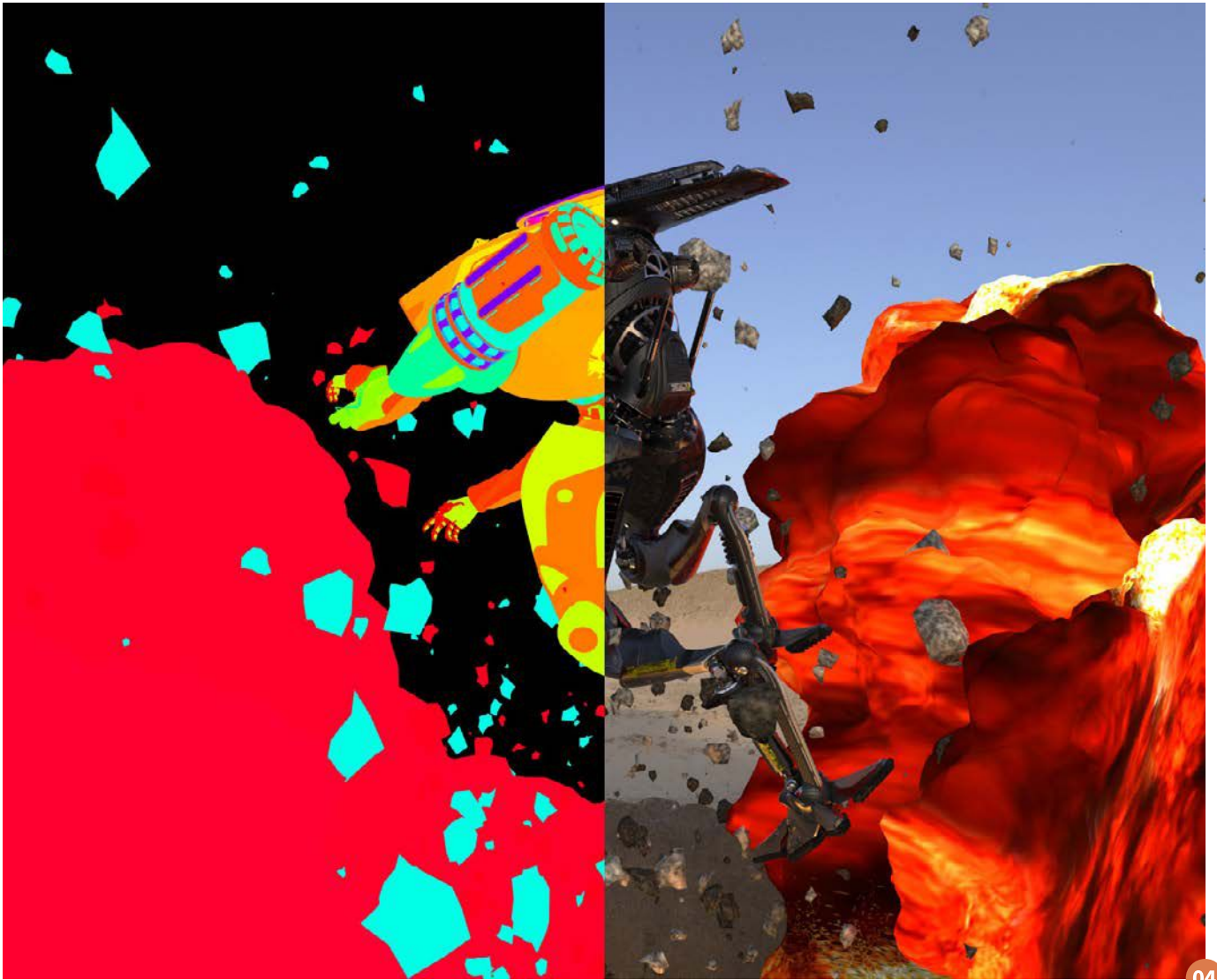
folder. The main folder contains everything about the manipulations of the different sections of the main subject (the robot); the secondary folder contains overall settings that affect the entire image. They are part of the first category folders for changes to the background rather than the robot, while in the secondary folder we find changes to lights, contrast, speed dials, texture and geometric guides for composition.

06 Add Noise: I add noise to my work because it helps to reduce the sharp definition of the edges of objects which is typical of 3D rendering. Setting the Blending Mode to Color Dodge adds brightness and contrast to the whole picture. To create noise I started by making a simple layer and filling it with solid black; making sure to set the background to white and the foreground to black – Filters > Add Noise and chose the parameters.

07 Adjustment levels: I added four levels of correction to the Noise level folder: Photo Filter, Hue/Saturation, Brightness/Contrast, and Curves. The Photo Filter set to Normal Blending Mode and 50% Opacity. Hue/Saturation also set to Normal with 80% Opacity. Brightness/Contrast and Curves both set to Normal and 100% Opacity.

08 Select and separate: Using the Clown pass, I selected areas of interest (for example the robot) with the Magic Wand tool (W or Shift+W to speed things up). With the robot selected, I copied everything in the selection (Ctrl+Shift+C) and pasted (Ctrl+V). This gave me a perfect copy of the robot which was separated from the background.
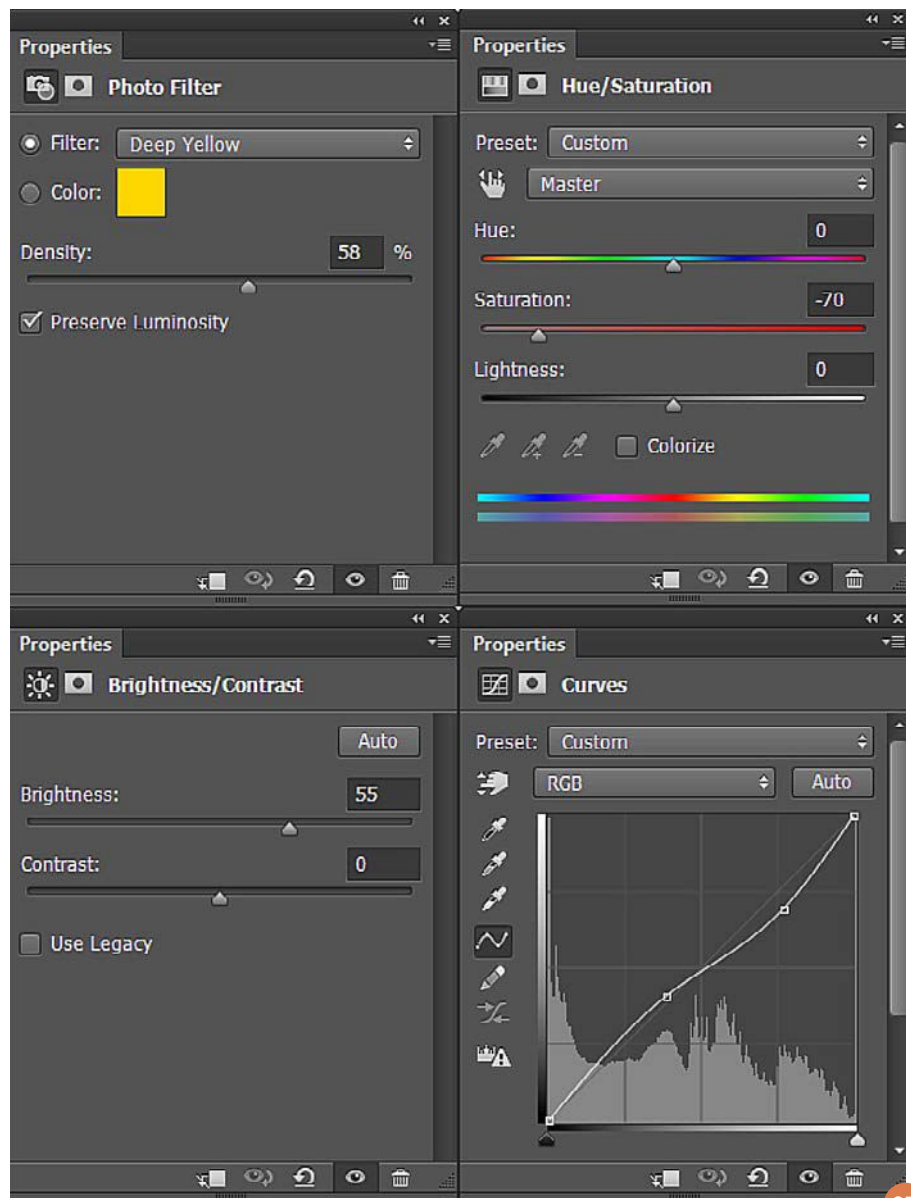
09 Sky and planet: I took a simple image of the sky to place behind the explosions and robot, with the Blend Mode set to Normal and 100% Transparency. I modified an image of Earth taken from space, setting the Blending Mode to Soft Light and Transparency to 47% to give a hint of the planet in the distance. ▶

06 Adding noise immediately reduces the effect of fake rendering

07 The settings for the adjustment levels

08 Separating the robot from the background

09 It is important to add the right amount of detail to your work

⚡ PRO TIPS

Mood and movement

Choosing the mood most suitable for your subject is essential to understanding how to set the scene. A war robot, in a dynamic pose has a different impact than the same character in a static position. The warm colors of the scene (explosion, dust) must saturate the image to give an alien feeling (you see the earth in the distance, so blue is not the main color).

Mix your techniques

Although it is possible to produce a 3D render that is perfect and elaborate, right down to its smallest part, you must always keep the focus on the timing and outcome. An abnormally long time to set a rendering (which might still be fixed later), is counterproductive: perhaps it is better to be more technical and, if the workflow permits, use shortcuts to get the most complete result.

3D is just a base

The virtual model and the 3D rendering is a good base on which to apply your knowledge of how light works, simulating reality by manipulating images and combining them together.

121

> "Photobashing is used to add texture to a piece of work using lots of real photographs; in this case I will use different parts of explosions mixed together to achieve the desired effect"

10 **Photobashing:** Photobashing is used to add texture to a piece of work using lots of real photographs; in this case I will use different parts of explosions mixed together to achieve the desired effect. The only requirement for this project is that the resolution of the textures is compatible with my image (280 x 200 cm at 72dpi). The casting method can be Normal or Hard light. I try to respect the shape of the clouds here, and the light that I created in 3D, because the reflections on the robot might otherwise look wrong or weird.

11 **Main character:** Here, my intention was to manually paint a layer of dirt and dust on the surface of the robot. The painting was done using a custom brush with triangular section; the brush settings are very simple I only had Transfer and Smoothing activated. In other areas, I cleared them with the Clone Stamp to remove debris or to slightly adjust textures that are repeated.
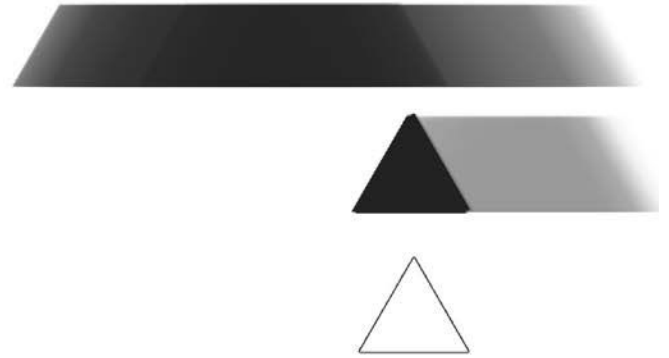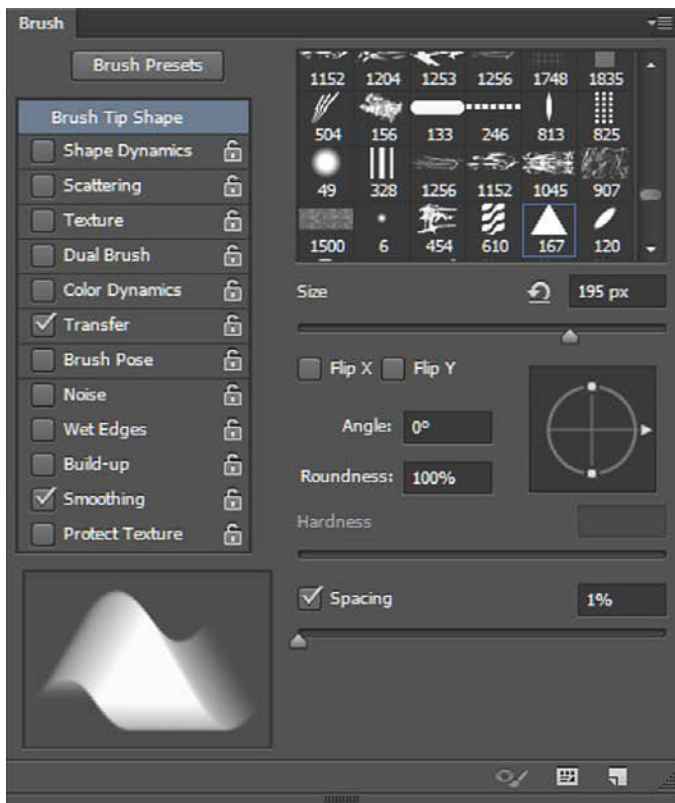
12 **Special effects on the central character:** On top of the main Layer, I added two different types of changes: heat
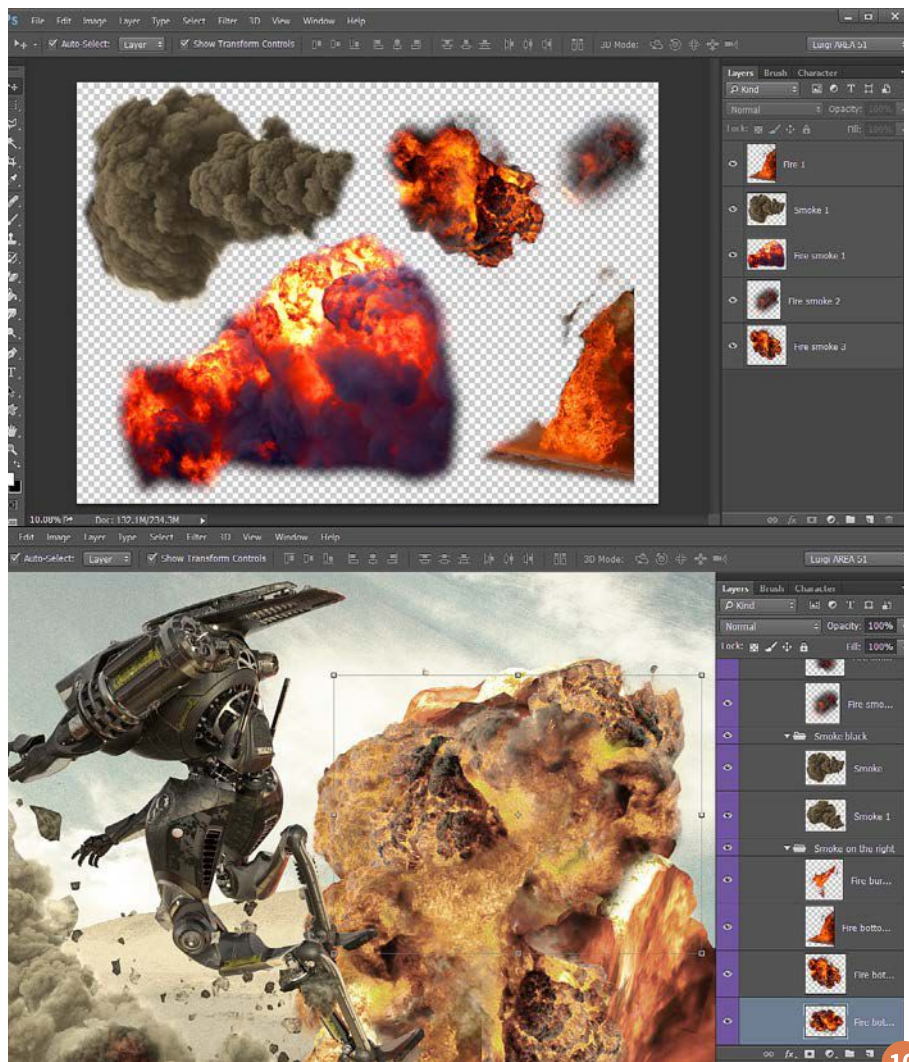
distortion in the vicinity of the flames and light effects. The heat deformation is very easy to achieve; I used the Lasso tool set to Feather to 30 pixels and selected an area near the reactor outlet of the robot's shoulder. Using Shift+Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V to copy and paste the selection just made. I then selected the Distortion Glass filter and played with the parameters. I repeated the same operation for all the other areas near the flames by adjusting the parameters of deformation and transparency accordingly.

13 **Forwards Element:** Using the same technique as Step 10, I created the explosion in front of the robot. I also added new textures, and slightly softened the focus – if you look at an action photo, there are elements in the ▶


12a

12b
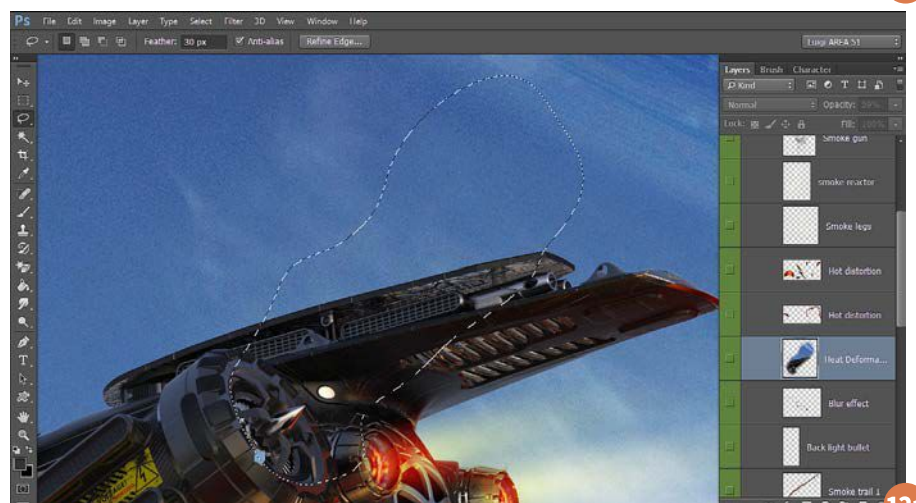
10 Try to use matching resolution of photo textures to match your work

11a A before and after of the same detail. As you see the painted uneven patina gives it a layer of dirt on ruined effect of materials

11b Settings for the triangular custom brush

12a Selecting the area to be deformed to give the optical effect of hot air

12b Comparison of before and after heat deformation using Distortion Glass filter
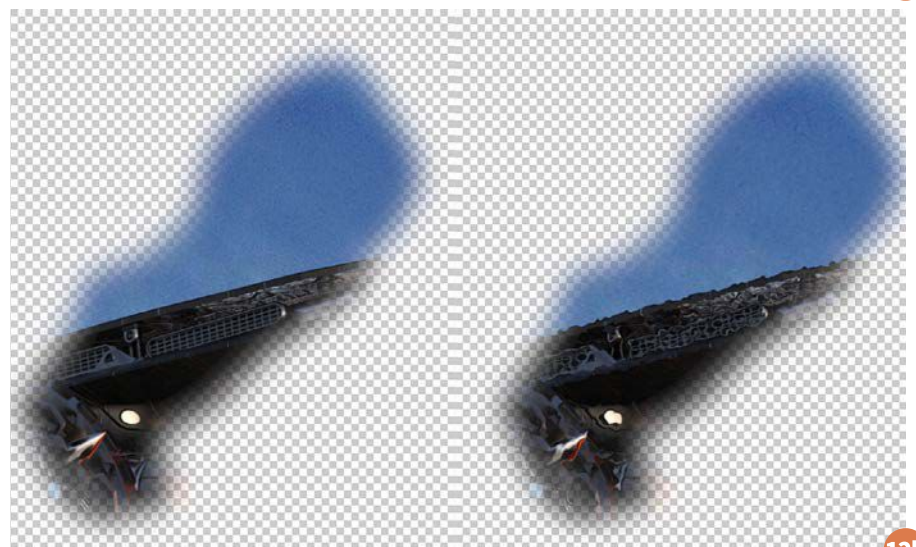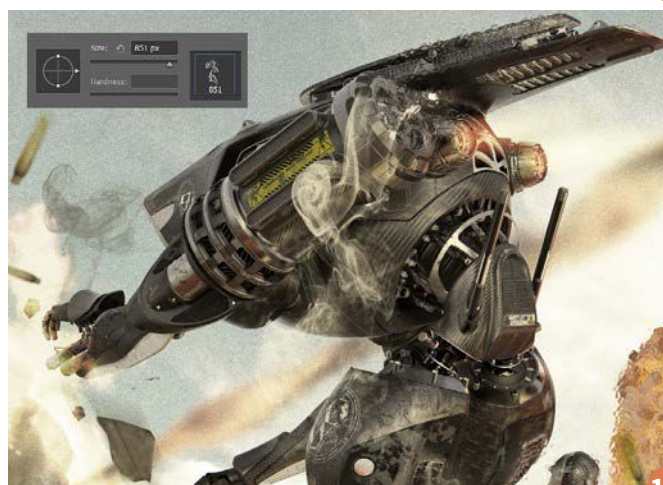
> "I like to specifically arrange all the elements of the composition so I can create movement and lead the viewer's eye around the image"

foreground that are unfocused and also some that move very fast and need to be blurred.

14 Composition: I like to specifically arrange all the elements of the composition so I can create movement and lead the viewer's eye around the image. To do this, I used the golden ratio proportion; the golden ration is useful for inserting those little elements (such as bullets in the wake of the missiles coming from all sides) that are able to guide the eye exactly where you want it.

15 Final Touch: Before finishing I added a few more final touches to add more realism and vitality to the image. I added some black and white smoke using one of my custom brushes. I save the full-resolution image to give the real finishing touch. As a final affect, I opened the image in Pixlr from Autodesk; it is a piece of
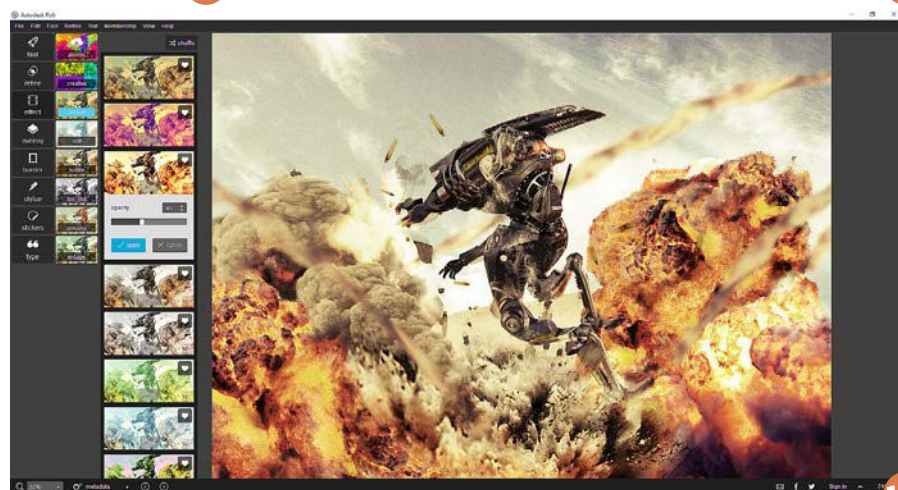
software that has a huge number of filters you can apply to your image.

I went with the Anne filter (found inside Classic Filters) and set the Opacity to 40%. Usually I open the image with Photoshop and open it with a program called Pixlr Autodesk. Within this software you can find many filters to apply. Inside the classic Filters I chose the Anne filter and I reduce its Opacity to 40%. I added my signature and logo and then I was done! ●

13 Before and after adding extra details and some motion blur

14 The final composition passes through the refinement of certain elements

15a Close-up of the smoke and custom brush

15b Adding one final filter in Pixlr from Autodesk
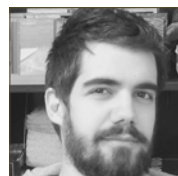
DIGITAL ART MASTER:

Rainy March

by Sina Pakzad Kasra

See how Sina painted a rain drenched illustration in Photoshop using a selective palette and brushes ▶

The Artist

Sina Pakzad Kasra
artstation.com/artist/sinakasra

Software Used:
Photoshop

Sina Pakzad Kasra is a freelance concept artist from the Heard and McDonald Islands, Australia. With a degree in Graphic Design and an MA in Animation, Sina now works in the entertainment industry.

Beginning to paint something from nothing without an idea is a pretty difficult job! And what's worse than that would be when you are not in the mood for doing anything or when you are busy with another project and suddenly a new idea pops up into your mind.

## "The best way for me to work is to draw a quick sketch of it"

Occasionally the first notions of a project come to me while I'm on other jobs painting or illustrating, and there's not enough time to get on with it, so the best way for me to work is to draw a quick sketch of it (usually in Photoshop) and get back to it at the right time and finish the job. In *Rainy March*, I intended early on to paint a biker woman in a leather suit standing amid the march of foot soldiers on a rainy day, but in the process of making it


● Use a thick brush to make the desired composition

I changed the environment to urban streets with people walking by. The main challenge for me was depicting the bike, and also the biker's pose with the proper perspective from the very low angle view, and I had to revise the drawing many times to get it right.

Instead of putting in too much time and effort in order to have it done in one session, I divided the time needed to finish the picture into two or three days; this way I had time to analyze each step at the end of the day and get better results from it.
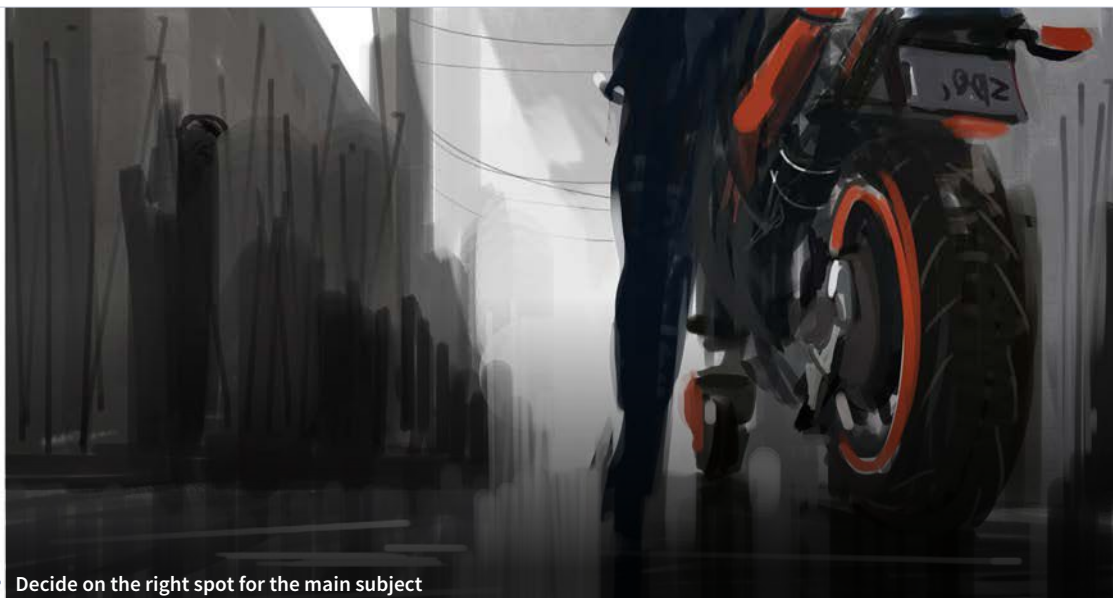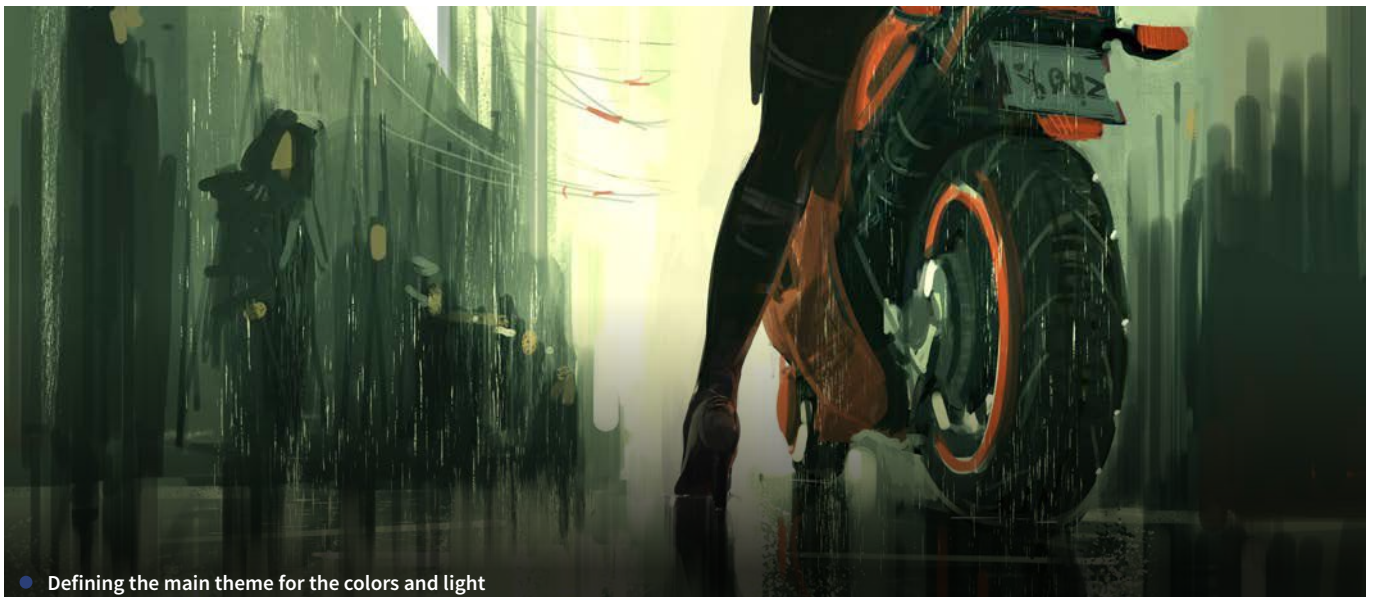

● Decide on the right spot for the main subject
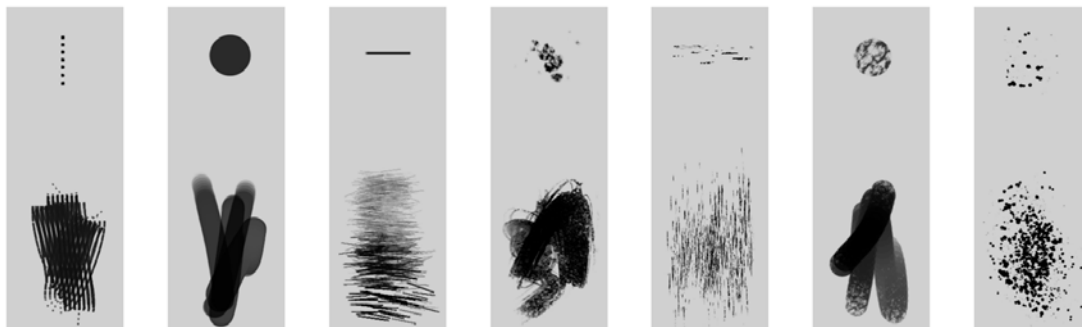
● Select suitable brushes to paint the project

● **Selecting the main color palette**

● **Defining the main theme for the colors and light**

Composition and staging

To begin with, I usually work with big surfaces and combine them to gain the desired composition, although many artists start with lines and drawing and some others mix both ways. Each procedure has its own advantages and everyone uses the most comfortable way for himself; what's important is the result.

I started with a horizontal canvas and used a thick brush with black, white and grays looking for the right composition. At first I tried to find a good angle (point of view) for the background, and after that I placed the bike and the woman in the best spot possible.

After drafting the angle and the composition, I widened the canvas size and went to my brush collection to choose the suitable ones for this illustration. I rarely draw multiple sketches before painting and mostly I refine and edit and replace elements to reach the best composition.

Color mood and lighting

Having the proper light source in mind and considering the lighting step at all times has a great result in the final outcome. For me, light is one of the fundamental elements in the process, and is very important since I think it breathes life to the picture. Also, selecting the proper colors and color contrast or balance is another prominent task in painting to always be aware of.

In this stage, I wanted to specify the general mood of colors and lights. To do so, I used the orange and a particular type of green to be the foundation of my palette. In fact, I used a dark-green as a general tone and added the orange plus a touch of red as color accents to give the painting a better look.

One of the most important things in selecting the colors is not only to select them right to achieve the best color harmony, but to pick them up in the boundaries of the right color contrasts to enrich the picture with dominance and appeal.

Adding details

One of the most time-consuming steps in the process of making an illustration or concept art painting is proceeding with the details. In this part I review the whole picture over and over and add details that I find most suitable. Deciding on the right details should be something that improves ▶

● **Change the location to an urban environment**

● **Prepare the project for adding details**

● **Add proper details in the proper areas**

Add light and fog for the depth, to better depict the distance between the subject and the background

Apply the Smart Sharpen filter to the whole of the image and also revise the bike's perspective

the general atmosphere of the image and never something unrelated to the theme and concept.

Before including the details, I decided to change the location and instead of foot soldiers marching on both sides of the biker, I put her in an urban surrounding which I thought gave more appeal, and also let me add more interesting details.

Another significant part of adding details is that you have to think about where the detail is needed and where it's not, because including too much detail in the wrong spot can ruin the composition stability.

Finalizing the image

Atmospheric lights and effects are usually included in the last steps after adding details. To better see the main subject, I added some changes in the dark and bright areas of the image so that the eye was lead to the woman

"Each challenge is a new lesson to become better at what we do"

and her bike – the main subjects. I brightened the background's depth and added more fog to amplify the distance between the main subject in the foreground, which is pretty dark, and the soggy street background which is pretty far away.

Also, I refined some minor issues in the bike's design and added extra details to emphasize the rainy atmosphere. In the end, to fill the painting with the desired sensitivity, I used the Smart Sharpen filter to give the brushstroke textures a better outlook and be more potent.

Conclusion

Ordinarily, when I finish a painting or an illustration I can't say I've painted one hundred percent the exact same image I had in mind.

I think to myself I could do it better and this thought gives me the best motivation to paint the next project.

Painting any new project brings up new experiences, and to improve our capabilities in this profession we need new experiences and challenges, which we shouldn't be afraid of.

Each challenge is a new lesson to become better at what we do. *Rainy March* is one of my works which I like very much and it's so exciting that it's one of the most popular works of mine on artistic and social websites.

Painting it taught me so much, especially in automotive design, and it made me more predominant in my job and my style of painting.
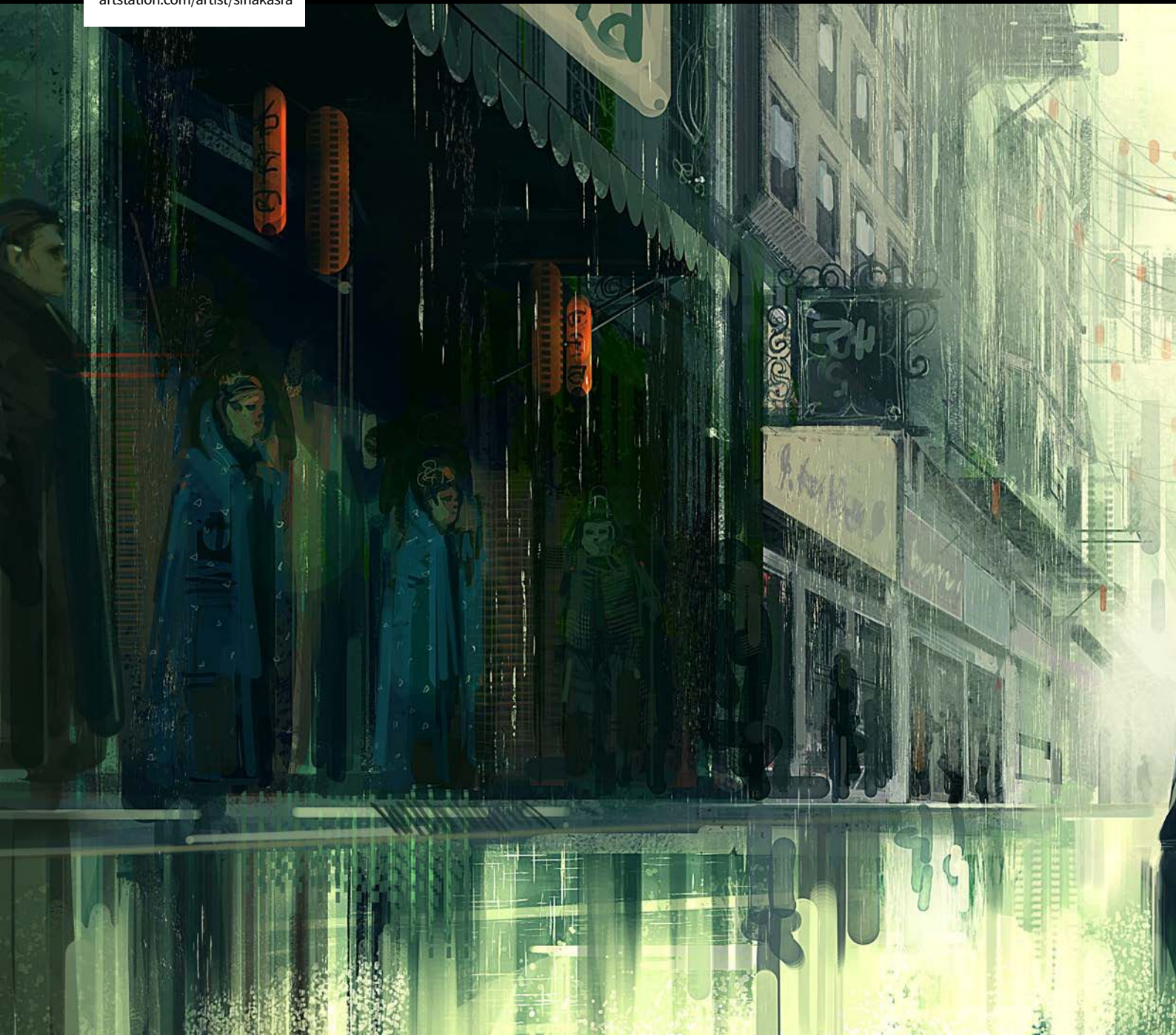
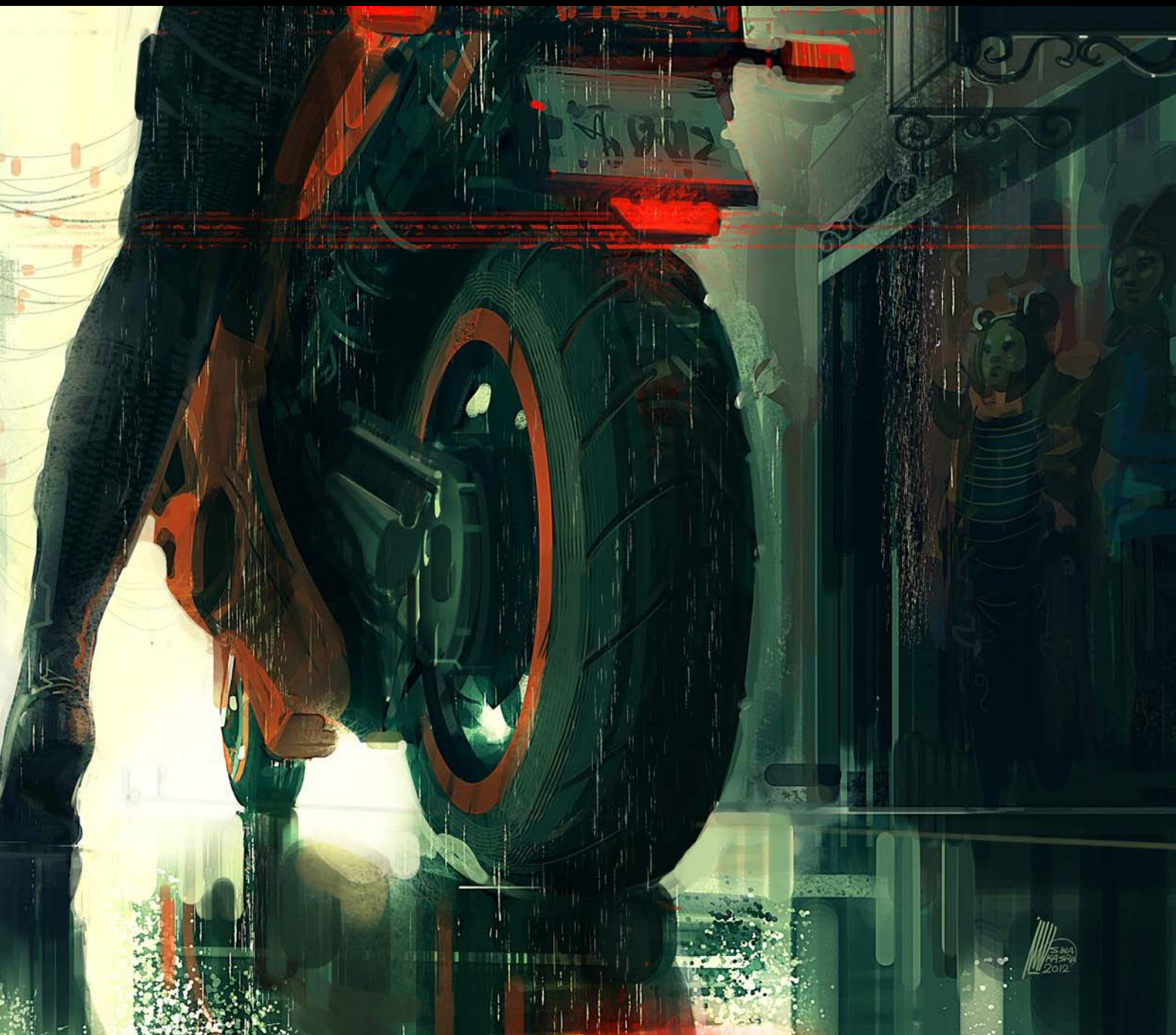Finally, I was very happy to add another well done project to my collection. ●

NEXT MONTH

Emotive traditional art

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Sci-fi fundamentals concludes

———

Paint a futuristic delivery truck

———

Ten inspiring gallery images

———

Speed paint atmospheric effects

———

Sketching game and book illustrations

AND MUCH MORE BESIDES!

2dartist